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Saint Paul's vision

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# SAINT PAUL'S VISION

AND

## *OTHER SERMONS*

BY

REV. EUGÈNE BERSIER

*Pastor of l'Eglise de l'Etoile, Paris*

TRANSLATED BY

MARIE STEWART

NEW YORK

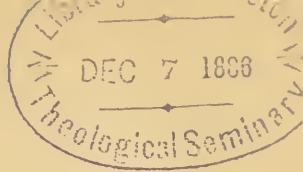
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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

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M. BERSIER is widely known as one of the foremost pulpit orators as well as one of the most active Protestant pastors of France. No translation of his sermons having appeared in this country, it has been thought that a selection of them would be of interest and value to the many of our countrymen who have heard Mr. Bersier in his own tongue, and in his own pulpit, or who know him by reputation; as well as to others who may be desirous of some acquaintance with the modern French pulpit.

The sermons presented in this volume were delivered by the author in the ordinary services of the Lord's-day, to his own congregation. They are strongly local in their coloring, dealing with the special and personal needs of those to whom he ministers. Yet nevertheless will they be found to address themselves to the needs of men and women in the great cities of our own land. The spiritual difficulties which beset Christians in the midst of the materialism and self-indulgence of the French metropolis, are just such as are making themselves felt more and more painfully among ourselves.

In this translation the attempt has been made to retain so far as possible the idiomatic form of thought and mode of expression of the original, and to convey in other words the lights and shades of the original, so far as is possible in a translation.





## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

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EUGENE BERSIER, was born February 5th, 1831, in the small village of Morges, on the borders of the lake of Geneva, in Switzerland. He is a direct descendant of French refugees exiled from their country at the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), and it is this extraction which caused him to look upon France as his adopted country. He studied at the College of Geneva. From infancy, under the influence of a pious mother who was early left a widow, he received religious impressions which were never forgotten. His natural tastes were especially directed to literature, and in college he stood highest in Greek.

At the age of sixteen he came to Paris, and was present at all the scenes of the revolution of 1848. Then he made a visit to the United States where he became familiar with the religious life of the Anglo-Saxon race. During the year 1850 he resided at New Rochelle on Long Island Sound, and it was then that he read Macaulay, Prescott, and the works of several distinguished American theologians. He was most hospitably received into the family of the Rev. Dr. Robert Baird and often heard the most distinguished of the New York preachers,

especially Dr. Bethune, Dr. James W. Alexander and Mr. Beecher.

It was during his sojourn in America that he determined to become a minister of the Gospel, and toward the close of 1850 he returned to Europe and to Geneva, where for three years he followed the course of study in the school of theology, under such teachers as Drs. Gaussen and Merle d'Aubigne. The influence of a former distinguished professor, the late Alexander Vinet was still powerfully felt in the theological school, and to his writings was largely due the special type of Bersier's theology.

After having finished his studies at Geneva, he supplemented them by a year's sojourn in the Universities of Halle and Göttingen, where he became acquainted with, and highly appreciated Drs. Tholuck and J. Müller and Dorner.

Upon his return to Paris in 1855, he was called to the pastorate of a church in the faubourg Saint Antoine, and for three years devoted himself to the evangelization of working men.

He married the daughter of Dr. Holland, co-laborer with the famous Agassiz, and uncle of M. Edmond de Pressensé. In 1860 he was called as assistant to the latter, in the charge of the Église Taitbout. It was there, before an intelligent, cultivated audience, that he demonstrated his calling as a preacher. His first volume of sermons published in 1864 had a wide circulation, reaching its tenth edition, and was soon translated into several foreign tongues. M. Bersier, was then called to preach in a number of towns in the provinces.

At Geneva he gave two series of lectures, on "Christian Ethics" (1866), and on "Independent Ethics" (1868). It was on this latter subject that he presented a paper the same year at the general conference of the Evangelical Alliance at Amsterdam. He then published an essay on "Solidarite," ("The Oneness of the Human Race.")

There followed the fatal year of 1870 and that war which Bersier did not hesitate to pronounce from the beginning foolish and wicked. Shut up for five months in Paris, he was one of the principal organizers of the service of ambulances, and as chief of the Protestant litter-men (*brancardiers*), he was present at all the battles which took place under the walls of the capital. At the same time he was obliged by force of circumstances to exercise with his colleagues M. de Pressensé and M. Coquerel, the role of political moderator, in founding and often presiding at the Club of the Porte Saint-Martin, which was the central rallying point of conservative republicans, opposed to the communistic ideas. When the Commune burst forth, he remained at his post and protested publicly against the imprisonment of the archbishop of Paris. He combated the Commune in a series of letters published by the "Journal de Genève." At the close of the war, in 1871, he received the cross of the legion of honor.

When peace was restored a new theatre of action was awaiting M. Bersier. He had founded in 1868 evening religious meetings in the west quarter of Paris near the porte de Neuilly. This work soon became so extensive that it was proposed to erect a church there, which M.

Bersier was to take entire charge of, and sever his connection with the Église Taitbout. After two years of work interrupted by a serious malady which endangered his life, he succeeded in raising the sum of five hundred thousand francs, and in erecting on the Avenue de Grande Armée, a large Gothic church which is called, "l'Église de l'Étoile," a few steps from the Arc de Triomphe, whence its name.

The church was dedicated Nov. 28th, 1874. It will seat from twelve hundred to fifteen hundred persons, and it is always crowded, so much so that they contemplate enlarging it. M. Bersier has introduced a liturgical service, with responses from the congregation, strongly resembling the service in the English Church, although the doctrine expressed in the prayers is precisely the same as tradition hands down from the ancient Reformed Church of France. He has expressed his views on this subject in the preface of his Liturgy. He regards the simple service of the Reformed Presbyterian Church as somewhat too unimpressive and cold for the sympathetic nature of the French; that it gives too great a prominence to the preacher, and does not sufficiently meet the needs of a common worship. This attempt to ameliorate the Protestant form of service caused at first, naturally, some severe criticisms. However it responded to a great want, as its success has proved.

M. Bersier has published up to the present time six volumes of sermons which have gone through many editions. They at last attracted the attention of the Roman Catholic public, and one of the most celebrated French critics, Mon. de Sacy, devoted to them an ex-



tended article in the "*Journal des Débats*." This appreciation from the pen of a Catholic writer, is of particular interest.

"As a moralist," writes De Sacy, "M. Bersier I have no hesitation in saying is equal to the most illustrious examples of our ancient Catholic pulpit. No one can surpass him in truthfulness and in keenness of perception. What is he as an orator? Has he the delivery, the action, the gesture of the orator? I presume so, without ever having heard him. But that he is an excellent writer, without affectation, without vanity, that he has attractiveness, good taste, that his style is always the true expression of his thoughts, the mirror of his soul, I affirm from knowledge. Seldom have I been so charmed as by these sermons of M. Bersier."

Although an advocate in theory of the separation of Church and State, M. Bersier in 1877 reunited his church to the consistory of the Established Reformed Church of Paris. He expressed his views on this subject in his discourses on "*The Church*" published in that year. He thinks that the Reformed Church of France in spite of the rationalistic elements which it contains through fault of its organization, is still the church which has the greatest chance of exercising a serious influence upon the nation; that from its historic past, from the fact that the Protestant population is deeply attached to it, it can have a great future, and it is not well to enfeeble it by premature secessions, which in depriving it of its best elements will deliver it over to the representatives of free thinking. It was under the influence of these considerations that other pastors, until that time attached to the Free Church,—

Messrs. Théodore Monod and John Bost,—joined, with M. Bersier, the Established Church.

Among the latest publications of Bersier, may be mentioned his letter to M. Jules Ferry, Minister of Public Instruction, in which he denounces with energy the intolerant measures which the French government proposed to take in the matter of education against the Catholic clergy, and especially the famous Article Seven which was fortunately rejected by the French senate. Very recently M. Bersier has obtained from the government an act of justice which has attracted the attention of the French press; it is the official promise of the concurrence of this government in the erection in the heart of Paris, facing the Palace of the Louvre, of a statue of Admiral Coligny, the illustrious victim of St. Bartholomew.

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I.

St. Paul's Vision.





## I.

### St. Paul's Vision.

*"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. There stood a man of Macedonia and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us.*

*"And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering, that the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them."*

ACTS xvi. 9, 10.

I CAN never picture to myself without emotion the moment when Saint Paul reached the sea shore at Troas, and for the first time stood gazing across the blue waters of the Hellespont towards Europe. The country which surrounded him was, as we know, one favored above all others, where, under a splendid sky, nature had lavished her beauties; the most ancient poetry had peopled its shores with heroes and gods. But the great apostle was not arrested by such thoughts; his heart and his life were devoted to another end. I imagine what his feelings must

have been when he saw the coast of old Europe in the distance.

Already, in the first rapture of his missionary ardor, had he traversed the entire western Asia, proclaiming Jesus Christ. It would seem as if so many perils encountered, so many fatigues endured, might have satisfied him. Another man would have been crushed under the spiritual burden of the many churches founded and the thousands of souls converted to the living God. But his heart expanded under the task, his ardor grew with the difficulties; it was Europe there that drew him. Beyond the sea rolling at his feet he sees Greece with her arts and her divinities which had charmed the world: he sees Rome, the mistress city, with all peoples kneeling before her; he takes in this world with the broad glance of his holy apostolic ambition; he dreams this dream, strange, extravagant, of subjecting it to Jesus Christ.

Then, as the Scripture tells us, when night came on, Paul had a vision. A man appeared before him, and calling him, said, "Come over the sea and save us." Thus God was answering his prayers and was transforming the ardent desire of his heart into a positive call.

“Come and save us!” It was the cry of the old world, a cry of distress, a cry of despair. It was the last word of that magnificent civilization, of that wonderful development of humanity. So many philosophers and sages, so many schools and academies, so many discussions and researches, so many laws and constitutions, so many orators and writers of genius, to end with this final word—“Come and save us!” Come and save us; for doubt is tormenting us; for after having been buffeted about upon the troubled waves of human thought we have stranded upon the quicksands of an eternal scepticism. Come and save us! for corruption is consuming us, the gangrene has penetrated to the marrow of our bones; for we no longer know what is purity; our depravities horrify nature herself. Come and save us! for we are all slaves, all kneeling at the foot of a being who was yesterday called Caligula, who to-morrow will be called Nero. Come, for our gods are dead, our temples silent, our priests scoffing at their own prayers and sacrifices. Come! for we are suffering, and there is no more hope for us.

The apostle then is about to embark upon this vast enterprise. Often before, over the sea

which he is to cross, conquerors have passed with their powerful armies. This was the route which Xerxes, Alexander, Cæsar, followed; and every time that these formidable multitudes passed with unfurled banners and immense preparations it was said, "The world is going to change masters." To-day it is only a bark rapidly bearing from one shore to the other, four ignorant men, Paul of Tarsus, Luke, Silas, and Timothy. No one, it is likely, notices their voyage; but these men are going to found a kingdom which shall never perish; and we, the descendants of those races to whom they were carrying the word of life, let us hail them and bless their memory.

This grand page from the apostolic times will serve to-day for our instruction. That which happened at Troas has been re-enacted in all ages of the Church, and in the history of every Christian soul. All of us, if we are Christians, have heard the cries of human misery, physical or moral, and these sorrows have called to us to come to their relief. Have you understood these appeals? Are you fulfilling this mission? This is the twofold question I wish to put to you.

If Paul, once a bigoted Jew and an unrelenting



Pharisee, was moved by the cry of distress from the old world, it was because he had become an apostle of Jesus Christ, and was following Him who first had seen the sombre vision of a lost humanity, and had given Himself up to save it. Paul saw in Jesus Christ, his king. Now what is the distinctive feature of this kingdom? It is a kingdom of love and of sacrifice. Those who before and after Him have reigned over men have said to themselves, "We will ascend." He said, "I will descend." They said, "We will rule." He said, "I will serve." Jesus Christ humbled Himself, He looked down; He heard the groaning of a guilty humanity, and that He might save it, He descended to the very bottom of the abyss of our sorrows and our condemnation.

Like master, like disciples! While by nature we are prone to look above us, toward whatever attracts and flatters our ambition and pride, Jesus Christ would ever recall our thoughts to things beneath us. He did not speak of the kings of the earth. Of all those whose names had resounded through the world, Jesus said not a word; and what a lesson in this silence! But He spoke constantly of those to whom no one

before had paid attention. To them He sought to direct the interest and love of His disciples. At the last day He will recognize as His own, and will welcome into glory such as have visited and succored these; He puts Himself in their place, He makes Himself in some way their representative in all the ages. In assisting them, it is He who is assisted and who is loved: and the better to instruct His disciples how they should serve their brethren, at the moment of leaving them He girded up His loins, knelt before them, and washed their feet, taking thus the posture and the service of the lowest slave, and adding, "That which I have done shall ye do also."

Everywhere this idea reappears in His teachings. It strikes me particularly in one of His most familiar parables, one too of those least dwelt upon because we dread its meaning so clear and which so utterly condemns our selfishness. "Then said He also to them that bade Him, when thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbors, lest they also bid thee again ('Lest they also bid thee'! how many are there who know anything of this fear?), and a recompense be made thee" (Luke xiv. 12).

Admirable illustration of the way in which religion, practiced in the spirit of the Master, ought to act for the transforming of society! Imagine this spirit comprehended and penetrating the world, what would we see? All superiority, natural or acquired, wealth, power, science, talent, genius, would constitute man a minister to those beneath him. These endowments, which sin has so often made the instruments of despotism and pride, would become the instruments of the spiritual elevation and gradual emancipation of all. Those who are highest would help those who are beneath them to rise to the light and to true moral freedom. Instead of meagre alms thrown carelessly into the gulf of human misery, instead of a few deeds done to ease the conscience and of which one soon tires, there would be a constant prepossession turning the heart toward misery and suffering, as surely and naturally as electricity turns the magnetized needle toward the north star.

Then we should see civilized and Christian nations, instead of making their superiority an instrument of conquest, turning toward those who are still plunged in the degradation of paganism and barbarism, and saying to them, in

the language of the parable, "Come and sit down with us." Then the learned, instead of shutting themselves up in that aristocratic disdain by which, as they pretend, impartial science should be recognized, would say to the ignorant, "Come, sit at the table of science, and partake of it." Then those who are rich, instead of regarding wealth as a pedestal for their selfishness and the means of an insolent display, which adds nothing to their influence if on the contrary it does not destroy it, would comprehend that God confers upon them a true patronage of intelligent solicitude for those who have no leisure, and who are crushed, as it were, by daily cares and the burden of unceasing toil. Yes, suppose society, inspired by this spirit, acting under its strong and steady impulse, to make light, life and progress to penetrate even to the lowest strata, could we not hope for much, and would we not be able to overcome at length, otherwise than by force, that levelling, savage spirit, those hatreds of class toward class, to which I often revert with persistency and grief, because they are the peril and shame of our brilliant civilization?

And what is the first condition of all this? It is that Christian love take possession of the

heart; it is that, transformed by the spirit of the Master, we learn from Him to look not above but beneath us; it is that like St. Paul we see in our visions those who suffer and are lost; it is that like him we hear their cry of distress and their appeal.

I have drawn the ideal; we must now compare with it the reality.

Have you never felt a profound sadness in looking over a map of the world and noticing what a narrow space Christianity occupies on it? I know all the great and heroic work which has been done in the field of missions, particularly in this century, since Christianity has awakened to the fact that she is here on earth to win the world to God. I know all the marvellous acts of devotion which Japan, China, Thibet, Oceanica, and Africa have witnessed. I know the streams of Catholic and Protestant blood which have been shed there for the Gospel; the long waitings, the shocking sacrifices, the terrible isolations, the agonies worse than death which have been endured; and I know the results obtained; I know that Asia and Africa are, as it were, enclosed by a *cordon* of missionary stations, and that in this ofttimes dead-

ly siege the combatants never flinch; I know the churches founded under every sky and announcing in tongues, hitherto pagan, the kingdom of Jesus Christ; I count with gratitude upon the first-fruits of the great harvests which await the future. But can these results satisfy us? does this suffice us? does it not seem to you that the pagan world turns to the Christian world and says to it, "Come and save me?"

On the one side, Europe and America over which the light is shining; on the other, the rest of the world yet wrapped in darkness! On the one side, civilization with all its refinements, all its treasures, all its sciences; on the other, a barbarism often savage, a cowardly despotism, ferocious and without restraint, peoples sinking into death, terrible famines periodically spreading over India and Persia. Oh, does it not seem that this enormous inequality ought year by year to disappear? Does it not seem that nations whom a superior life enlightens and reanimates should unite in disseminating through the rest of the world some little progress, some little justice, some little humanity? And then when it is said that hitherto the superior races have oftenest used their power and their intelligence

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only to oppress and plunder the weaker; that their policy toward them has been for centuries a long series of iniquities; that it is the sinister aureole with which they have encircled their name of Christian,—does it not seem that an imperious sense of justice should urge them to a mission of reparation and peace? Alas! we would it were so; but do you know what these Christian nations are doing at this moment? They are on the watch against each other, they are filling their arsenals, and no one knows but on the morrow they may be in bloody conflict. Yes, these men you have met in all parts of Europe, the men whom you have seen associated in the same labors, honestly joined in the same noble researches in science, inspired to enthusiasm by the same splendors of art and nature, their hearts vibrating with the same emotions, and must I say it, bowing before the same God, praying to the same Saviour,—alas! they will meet one day in international warfare upon some yet unknown spot of Europe, upon that battlefield of the future where your own beloved son may fall. See where we stand! See how civilized peoples are fulfilling their mission toward the rest of the world.

Oh, that the Church at least understood her mission! Oh, that she heard the call of the world and answered it! I have recalled what she has accomplished in our days; but is there yet in this anything that appears like a great triumph? In presence of these two thirds of our fellow-men still heathen, have we not felt our conscience tremble under the sting of remorse? Have we not heard the call which troubled St. Paul? Ah, do I speak of the heathen! When you traverse our large cities, when you see those thoughtless, frivolous crowds, when vice and degradation, elegant or vulgar, encounter you on your way, when cynical atheism lurks at the bottom of so many souls, and despair at the bottom of so many sorrows, think you that the Church can be still and say, "I have done, O God, the work Thou hast given me to do"? How can we help groaning at thought of so much fruitless debate, of intestine strifes which consume our vitality, our resources, and our time? For these controversies the material will never be wanting; the first incident suffices to rekindle the flame, and then you know too well how quickly it takes possession of the Church.

You will say to me, that the truth when as-



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sailed, must be defended. I know it and would guard against counselling here, under the pretext of charity to others, a cowardly indifference towards the revealed truth of which we should be the depositaries and witnesses; I believe, moreover, that to give the truth to others is the first and best proof of charity toward them; I believe also, that to weaken the truth is the surest way to dry up this charity at the very fountain head. Yes, let us defend the truth, or rather, believe me, let us assert it as fully and faithfully as we can, leaving it oftener than we have done to defend itself. Let us first believe in it more fully ourselves, and let us have faith in its intrinsic power, rather than in the arguments by which we support it. Let us search the depths and riches of it; let us be the priests and worshippers of the sanctuary before becoming its guardians; let us keep ourselves nearer the altar and less often on the outer battlements. Let us be less the advocates of the Gospel than its witnesses. Let us be more engaged in being faithful to the truth than in reasoning with our adversaries. There is a triumph in dispute which is but a snare, and which leaves the mind dissatisfied and the conscience troubled. To serve

the truth of religion with our passions or our scoffs; to descend to the level of personalities; to relish the malicious pleasure which the humiliation of our adversaries brings,—is fruitless work, is sowing seed in the sand; it is even worse, it is to discredit and calumniate the cause we would save.

But do not think, I pray you, that I counsel here a sort of idyllic peace, or an assumed meekness, which would be but a mask. Ah! doubtless we will always have conflicts, but it behooves us to know in what spirit we are to maintain them, and whether the love of God, of our brethren, and of our enemies themselves, be strong enough in our hearts to expel all personal concern.

And here I will refer to St. Paul, to his whole life, which throws wonderful light on this point. You know with what power, what ardor, what logic, St. Paul defended the Christian truth. But see also with what energy he knows how to detach himself from these controversies, and to press on the more eagerly to the conquest of souls! Surely to one trained in a school of rabbis, theologian by nature and education, logician to the very marrow of his

bones, the temptation was great to fall into this snare. Do you find him engaging in barren controversies, wasting upon them his marvellous resources of skill and genius? I do not know what in that case his character would have become, but I ask myself if, after all that, we would have recognized his work and his name. What did St. Paul do? Leaving Judaism to waste away in the discussions of the scribes, he listened, and heard the groanings of the heathen world; he said to himself, "The time has come; let us create a new people for God," and he, the disciple of Gamaliel, the former rabbi, the Pharisee, the sectary, he has become this great, this noble heart, capable of embracing in his vast love the entire heathen world.

You will say to me perhaps that the cry of distress which St. Paul heard does not ring in our midst, and that there must be a call before there can be a response. Ah! we know it only too well, this cry is rare. They are material sorrows which speak first, and speak loudest. But think you it was different in St. Paul's time? Think you that consciences were less dull, less asleep at Ephesus or Athens than they are in Paris? Is not a false, carnal security in a cer-

tain sense the normal condition of the most wicked in every age? Think you that if St. Paul had looked only at the surface of ancient Greece, at her frivolous manners and at her continual festivals, he would have heard the cry which called him away? Unquestionably, no! It was with the divination of love that he heard it and understood it. He tore away all delusive veils, he saw to the bottom of things, and found that bottom to be sad and hopeless.

Well, be not deceived about it; nothing is changed here. Notwithstanding the proud pretensions of an exact science, notwithstanding the serenity that many men affect, there is lurking in every soul which is not plunged into a sensual life, and which has not, in the language of Scripture, become flesh, a hidden sorrow which appeals for consolation, a moral trouble which calls for peace. There are the remains, alas! often defiled and broken, but still the remains of that altar which St. Paul found at Athens, and which was dedicated to the unknown God, but which seemed to be awaiting the holy, living, and true God!

I have spoken, thus far, of the Church in general; but nothing is so deceptive as generalities.

I address myself now to each one of you, my brethren. Redeemed by Jesus Christ, do you hear the voices which called St. Paul? Have you like him seen the vision of a world lost, and far from God?

Your visions! Do you know what they are? I will tell you, for you all have visions which pursue and haunt you, even into the watches of the night.

That young girl who hears me, what are her dreams? Has she ever seen pass before her any of the miseries of this earth? When flattering lips whisper to her, when every wish is gratified, when everything is done to make her life attractive and lovely, has she ever thought of other young girls who are growing up in poverty and perhaps in shame? Has she ever said to herself that the faith which has surrounded her young life with pure influences and a sweet celestial peace, was wanting elsewhere, or cruelly scoffed at? Has she suffered from this? Has she understood the duty and the happiness of scattering over these miseries a consolation which comes from on high? Has she ever looked forward to her life as one to be devoted to the austere but noble path of con-

secration and sacrifice? Let us turn from this delusive picture. Her visions are the world's enchantments, its applause and its enticements. She has seen herself charming in her beautiful attire, she has heard the murmur of admiration which waits upon her steps. Ah! were this but the fascination of a day, who of us would cast the stone at her? But if this fascination commence again to-morrow, if always in the midst of her dreams this vision calls her and charms her, if life for her is the pleasure that the world gives, if it be the world's intoxications—ah, well, she can be admired and fêted, she can see those even whom God has given her for protectors and guides, and who owe to her the truth, mingle their flatteries with those of the world. . . . It matters not, the veil which deceives her must be torn away. At the bottom of her heart is selfishness—yes, beneath that charming exterior, cold selfishness in its frightful ugliness. . . . What a destiny is hers! What an account to render at the last hour! What an inevitable sentence upon this life without God and without sacrifice.

I will notice here an opinion very prevalent in the world, and very easily accepted. Noth-

ing is more frequent than the assertion that devotion and charity are very frequently allied with dissoluteness, with the impulses of passionate natures. The admirable traits of certain women of the world are readily cited, and with a malicious pleasure are contrasted with the well-regulated selfishness of those who live sober lives.

I admit that one often sees examples of sudden devotion, of unexpected charity, of real sacrifices, in the bosom of a very dissipated and even openly immoral life. I can understand that a tormented conscience, a heart disturbed by a frivolous life, may throw itself impulsively into charity, piety, and even into sacrifice. Such persons need at times a refuge, a shelter, something to rest and calm them for a moment. But what is there true and lasting in these acts? How can they redeem the scandal of a life of giddiness to which God is but a stranger? How efface the deplorable effects of such an example? Moreover, do you always have confidence in the sincerity of these acts? Men jeer at the absurdity of fictitious piety; but is counterfeit coin found only in religious circles? Has not the world its false sentimentality, its blustering

virtues, its apparent devotion, in fine its pharisaism? Because a dissipated and frivolous woman has on some occasion done some acts of charity, which a Christian woman would consider the most ordinary of her duties, she will be received with a chorus of praises and her charity will be exalted to the very clouds; but does this outburst of charity change the fundamental character of her life? Does it prevent the inspiration of that life's being pleasure; that is, to speak truly, selfishness, in other words the death of true love? *A*

I know also that selfishness can be perfectly joined with the utmost propriety of belief and life. There are natures very precise, and incapable of devotedness. Certain religious circles offer too numerous examples of this. They have their traditional virtues, and one of the most noticeable is their love of domestic life and respect for its duties, and beside a real aversion to any glaring dissipation, a certain conventional sedateness. They think well of themselves for it, and are content with it; and because they possess these virtues, because they have a horror of scandal, they do not perceive that they are buried in their own interests, in the pride of



position, in their good fortune, in the love of affluence; and that they are managing to be Christians without even knowing self-denial or sacrifice. The worldling understands them and mocks them; but I will not leave him that malicious pleasure. I say to him, "Do you know what causes this amazing blindness?" It is yourself. Yes, yourself, for if you did not give the example of dissipation and scandal, they would not make a merit of the simple fact that they lead an honest and regular life. It is you who lower the moral standard; it is you who are the cause of it, that a woman tranquilly regards herself above reproach merely because she has not violated her obligations as wife and mother. If it were not for you, one would look higher for one's ideal, and instead of believing one's self virtuous because not fallen, one would perceive that above these natural affections there is a boundless world of devotion and charity. Without you, this selfishness which we with you condemn, would be without excuse. It would fear for itself, it would be affrighted at its guilty inaction. It is you who reassure it.

Let us then no longer credit the sophism that a worldly life does not extinguish charity. It is

at the bottom its mortal enemy. It takes from it first all its time, and then its resources; it withers down to the very roots the power of loving and of sacrificing self.

Yes, if you pass by sufferings without seeing them, if you hear the cries of distress without heeding them, it is because the worldly life blinds your eyes, hardens your heart and closes your ears; if poverty importune you, if deeds of charity annoy you, it is because pride, pleasure and vanity have insolently consumed their portion. Now we must not be deceived; if the Gospel be true, this is a question of life and salvation. I tell you that in the course you are pursuing, you will lose your soul; you will lose it in spite of your orthodox faith, in spite of your periodic repentance, in spite of your effusions which even amount to tears; for God looks at the heart and yours belongs to the world, yours belongs to vanity: your treasure is far from God upon earth, therefore your portion will be far from Him in eternity.

And you, my brethren, what are the visions which pass before your eyes? When you look into the future, what is it that attracts and allures you? Do you think of all those good and

holy causes which are waiting you perhaps and depend upon you? Are you concerned about preparing yourself for the struggle? Do you long to become bold in spirit and character, to resist evil, to combat against all tyrannies, beginning with those of the flesh and of sin? Do you ever see pass before you those whom you might aid with your hand and your heart? Do you hear the voices which cry out to you as they did to St. Paul, "Come and help us!" Ah! who says to me that your dream may not be one of glory? Literary glory may be your idol. Your vision is a great name on every tongue,—or perhaps it is wealth with its power and its credit, a high position quickly achieved,—perhaps higher than all this, it is science with its noble discoveries, with its pure joys;—are those your visions? Talents, wealth, and science, admirable weapons when devoted to God's service for the redemption and salvation of mankind, but which, separated from this great end, are only instruments of selfishness, only splendid idols which draw away from God our worship and our love.

Where are the men of this age who see the vision of St. Paul pass before their eyes? Where

are those whose hearts hear the groanings and miseries of their generation, and who realize that they must consecrate their life to them? Do you know how all the great works began? Men appeared who had seen what no man had ever seen before. St. Paul saw the old world lost, and he brought to it the Gospel. The reformers saw the church enfeebled and dying, and re-opened to it the refreshing springs of grace and of the eternal word of God. Pascal saw the false devotion which would ruin Catholicism and he wrote against it his immortal book; Vincent de Paul saw little orphans cast away in the street, and he established his great work; Wilberforce saw the negroes sold like cattle, and he overturned slavery. Before all these a vision passed, it followed them, it haunted them, it left them no more rest.

“Visions!” say the world and they mock at it. You too will meet the mockers. Twenty centuries before Jesus Christ, a young shepherd of the tribe of Abraham told his visions to his brothers. He saw in the depth of the future a great glory awaiting him; but his brethren heard him with a smile of contempt and hatred, and said of him as he passed by—“Behold the

dreamer cometh!" Thus, when God marks with His own hand some soul predestined to a great mission, when He brings before his eyes the vision which will decide his destiny, when He unrolls before him the future He has assigned him, the world repeats the mocking words of Joseph's brethren,—“Behold the dreamer cometh.”

And when there came the child of Nazareth who dared to dream of the kingdom of God on earth in absolute justice and truth, and who foresaw His kingdom of love increasing through the centuries, His own brethren said, “He is a madman;” the Pharisees cried out, “He is possessed, he is a demoniac;” and Pilate the sceptic shrugged his shoulders. That which happened to the Master awaits his followers. Ask it of St. Paul appearing before Festus and hearing those words of derision: “Too much learning, O Paul, doth make thee mad.” Dreamer! yes, and it is the condemnation of this world that charity is to it a dream, and the cross foolishness.

A dream, a folly, and yet it is on these terms that the Gospel will conquer. If Christianity dares not go as far as that to-day, the world

will cast it aside like an extinguished torch, like salt without savor. Leave the Gospel in the hands of sages, a hundred times would they have lost it ! It is the dreamers who a hundred times have saved it; it is the madmen who have dared to lose their lives, who have loved without calculation and unto sacrifice.

My brethren, when St. Paul had heard the call from God, the Scripture says simply that he departed. Let this word be our last lesson. One may have contemplated the most sublime visions, may have felt his heart penetrated with the most lively emotions, may have trembled with admiration before the ideal Christian, and yet have remained none the less a poor self-seeker, a useless being whom God will reject at the last day. What then must be done ? You must depart; in other words, you must sever the ties which bind you to worldliness, to sensuality, to pride; you must depart, that is, you must go, each to his work and do it steadily even to the end. "Happy are ye," the Master has said, "who know these things if ye do them." Amen.

II.

Moses.





## II.

### Moses.

*"For he endured as seeing Him who is invisible."*

HEBREWS ii. 27.

HE endured. I like this phrase in which the Scripture sums up the whole life of Moses. It offers a striking contrast to all that we see around us to-day.

Our age, more than any other, has stirred the sensitive, delicate chords of the human heart; it has spoken to man, in tones often penetrating, of his sorrows and his joys. Its literature and its art, cultivated by great masters, have sometimes intoxicated him with vague and deep reveries. It is not only the sensibility of the soul that it has developed; luxury in becoming common has destroyed all the simple pleasures, and created for human nature artificial wants, which are ever growing. But this progress, if such it be, has been dearly bought.

Man's higher nature has succumbed beneath the enervating influences; the human will staggers as if overpowered by drunkenness. There is nothing now more rare than men with character, who know their own minds.

Look around us. Behold the humiliating spectacle of great nations, blown about like so much dust by the changing breath of passing revolutions, cursing to-day what yesterday they adored, adoring now what to-morrow they will curse. See, even in the bosom of the Church, forms replacing convictions, the clergy made to march like a regiment, and the most elevated consciences forced to the most astonishing retractions. Penetrate to the other extreme of the thinking world, to the camp of that philosophy which denies God, and knows nothing real but the world and man. They say, that in elevating humanity, they will make men strong in will, firm in convictions; but we see the very contrary. This century astounds us with its recantations; discouragement is one of the keynotes which sound from the spirits of our day; and never have there been as many suicides as since man has been taught that the present fills out all his destiny. The parties which now divide men

have the fictitious power which the passions give, rather than the real force which springs from character.

On this point I call you to witness. Where among us are the men of will? Who among us does not tremble when he thinks of the days, perhaps years, during which he has drifted from one belief to another without any real direction and without aim? Who has not felt with humiliation and bitterness, how hard it is to-day to will and to resist? Many of my hearers, perhaps, have felt at times in their innermost souls, as if their principles were vacillating with their beliefs, so that their moral life seemed on the point of crumbling away. We boast of being broad, and of embracing all things. Is this a sign of strength and manhood? Is not scepticism recognized by this sign, that embracing everything it excuses everything?

Feeble children of this weak age, see before us the example of a man of God "who endured," a man who was chosen to show by his works the dominant trait of his character, to be the founder of the most remarkable, the most enduring monument the world has ever seen, I mean the Jewish people. Think of it! history

offers nothing like it. There is upon the face of the earth a strange race, insignificant in point of numbers, without military genius or political skill; but a race chosen to outlive all others, in spite of trials the most extraordinary and cruel that any nation has ever known; planted at first upon a small territory which was trodden by all the conquerors in their march, devastated a hundred times by strange tribes and internal strifes, she has been trampled upon by all the powerful monarchies of the east, the Assyrians, the Medes, the Persians, and the Egyptians, more voracious than the insects which devour the harvest, more withering than the simoom which parches the fields. Exiled for nearly a century beyond the Euphrates, she was restored for a time to her native soil as if to give to the world the spectacle of the most frightful ruin; her temples were destroyed, her traditions were annihilated, her sacred books burned, and the ploughshare driven through her cities. At last she was scattered in exile, like a handful of dust to the four winds. For eighteen hundred years she has been wandering amid the nations, without a place to lay her head or gather her scattered members. She has been exposed to all the corruptions which

could weaken her, to all the idolatries which could lead her astray, to all the temptations and contempt which could crush her.

Yet to-day, thirty-five centuries after Moses, she stands before the world ever true to her faith in one living God, to her ancient customs, to her sacred books which she reads in the language of her fathers, to the mysterious waiting for a divine liberator. Nothing could enfeeble this marvellous vitality. Babylon and Nineveh, Alexandria and Athens, Rome and Constantinople, have fallen. She has survived all the ruins of the past, as she will survive all those of the present. Ever the same in her distinctive features, she marks each of her children with an indelible type. Whether they be counsellors or kings—as once was Joseph, Nehemiah, or Daniel,—whether they charm the imagination by their fine arts or astonish the world by their colossal wealth, as Meyerbeer, Halévy, Rachel or Rothschild;—whether they be as poor as the beggars in the ghettos of Italy;—everywhere, beneath the fogs of Poland as under the skies of Portugal, in Paris as in China, they are recognizable at first sight.

Well, ye legislators of the nineteenth century,

creators of constitutions more ephemeral than the leaves of the forests, contemplate this extraordinary race which alone has traversed all the ages; in the endurance of the work, recognize that of the workman: and if you do not see therein the divine hand, confess that genius has never produced anything more amazing.

If we could ask Moses the secret of his strength, he would tell us, that it was not a fruit of nature, nor even an achievement of the will. Timid and incompetent to such an enterprise, he shrank from the task, and accepted it but with trembling. His strength did not come from "flesh and blood," but from divine grace, and he found it by faith. "He endured," says the Scripture, "as seeing Him who is invisible." Wonderful words, of which I wish to show you in the career of Moses, the practical, the living commentary.

The Scriptures distinguish in his secular life three consecutive periods, of equal duration. Moses spent his youth in Egypt, in Pharaoh's court; during his ripe years, until his hair began to whiten, he wandered alone in the vast desert, gathering himself up for his sublime mission; finally, during the last forty years of his life, he

was struggling as the leader of his people, whom he was conducting to the promised land. It is in these three different situations that we will contemplate him, realizing those simple but grand words,—“He endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”

We find ourselves at first in ancient Egypt, at the time when that country was the cradle of the civilization of the world. The arts and sciences had appeared there for the first time on our globe, and from the beginning Egypt gave promise of her great future. Even to-day the human mind is stupefied before the prodigious monuments built by this people, and we ask, by what secrets unknown to our engineers they reared those gigantic pyramids; and in our expositions I have seen great artists studying with admiration the delicate handiwork of the jewellers of the court of the Pharaohs.

It was amid such surroundings that a young Israelite grew up, called, by a strange combination of circumstances, to the most brilliant position which could flatter the ambition of man. A child of a proscribed race, he could attain every honor. The world offered him the most intoxicating cups; he had but to bend him-

self to drink the longest draughts. If it were pleasure he were seeking, where could he find it more exquisite and subtle than at this court where multitudes of slaves lived but to gratify the caprices of their masters? If it were science which attracted him, how could he better penetrate her secrets than by gathering around him all the wise men and philosophers, who crowded the schools and the mysterious sanctuaries of this favored land? If it were power which tempted him and he wished to command the multitudes, lead armies, hear his name proclaimed with enthusiasm by millions of voices, and assist in his own apotheosis, the throne was open to him. All these splendors, these dreams passed before Moses; perhaps once his heart may have been troubled by these seductive visions, but other thoughts pursued him, another love, another ambition possessed him and left him no rest. He thought only of his people, and of his God! This people is enslaved, this God unknown. Moses saw his brethren struck by the rod of the taskmaster, bowed beneath the burning suns of Africa, and covered with ignominy. In the palaces of the kings and in the public places, he saw the monstrous idols which



the Egyptians worshipped, and like Saint Paul afterwards in the streets of Athens, his believing heart was filled with a profound bitterness. Ah! the seductions of wealth, of pleasure, of visible glory, may assail him. The waves of the sea make no more impression upon a rock than did they upon him. He endures, because he sees Him who is invisible. He sees Him, and that suffices him; it is his God whom he will serve, it is his God to whom he would devote himself; and as his people bear with them the promise of a deliverer to come, the Messiah who shall found the Kingdom of God on earth, Moses, the Scriptures tell us, prefers the reproach of Christ to all the wealth of Egypt, for it was the cause of Christ and of the salvation of the world he was unconsciously serving.

My young brethren who listen to me, there is in every man's career a time when he must make the solemn choice which is to decide the course of his life. Outward circumstances have changed. Nothing around us reminds us of ancient Egypt with her idolatries and her seductions; nothing recalls the painful servitude and opprobrium of Israel; but penetrate beneath the surface to the bottom of things, and you will find nothing

changed. There is ever the same choice between God and the world, between the enticements of visible things and devotion to the truth. "Live for self," says the tempter, "use your talents for your own benefit; seek distinction in science, aspire to success and influence; or if these seem beyond your reach, if they demand too hard a struggle, stoop and sip the intoxicating cup of pleasure, demand of the present moment all its charms." So sings the enticing and treacherous voice, and the multitude follow it. Ah, in your dark moments, when the will wavers under the bewilderments of avarice and pride, one thing alone can save you, and that is, to fix your thoughts on Him who is invisible; to oppose to all that is seen, to all that dazzles, to all that charms, the righteousness and truth which belong to the unseen. *℣*

This is not the side, I know, which wins the suffrages of the world. A genuine faith, a really Christian life is a constant subject of wonderment and mockery to the world; as the Scripture justly calls it, "The reproach of Christ,"—a reproach which is just as real now as ever. Men will laugh at your hopes, and ask to what delusion you have yielded; your faith in God and trust

in His word will be treated as an enthusiasm or a fanaticism. Let them say and do what they will. Moses was a fool to the men of his time, because he sacrificed everything the world coveted to the sublime folly of the Kingdom of God in an unknown future. Well for you, if like him you bear the reproach of the holy cause; well for you, if you endure, seeing Him who is invisible, and opposing to all the jeers and seductions of the passing world the unyielding assertion of that which is eternal.

Moses fled from Egypt. In a moment of excitement he had resolved to liberate his people, but his own had rejected him. So with a heart full of sorrow he took refuge in the desert, as afterward did Elijah, and John the Baptist, and all those whom God would detach from the world that so their victory over it might be the easier. See him amid the gloomy solitudes of Sinai, wandering alone with the nomad tribe of Rehuel. Here, it would seem, were no more temptations, no more idols. Here the memories of Egypt will not follow him. Here the starry skies will speak to him of Jehovah, and tell him of His glory. Like the patriarchs of old, he can build his altar of

stone and with sacrifices invoke the true and living God, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. He can feed his soul with the grand promises bequeathed him by his forefathers, and prepare himself for his sublime mission. All this is true; but beware! isolation also has its tests and terrible temptations. To believe alone, to hope alone, to love alone, is sometimes a burden too heavy for the human soul. And then, if only this solitude were of short duration! But the days and years pass slowly in their monotonous cycle. Each evening the sun sets in the west, and the exiled believer says to himself, "Tomorrow God will speak to me." Each morning the dawn breaks in the east, and he says, "My hour cometh." But the Almighty remains silent. Moses must wait, and still wait, until his soul is filled with strange doubts, and perhaps he asks himself, as afterward did Elijah, whether God has not forsaken his cause, or, as Isaiah, whether he has not spent his strength for naught, and in vain (Is. xlix. 4).

Ah, my brethren, these long and withering agonies! Who among us has not known them? Who of us has not wondered often at God's si-

lence, and after believing that the triumph of justice was at hand, has not groaned in spirit to find the world moving on its course, and "all things continuing as they were from the beginning of the creation?" (II Peter iii. 4). In vain have we learned that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and that it is madness for the creatures of a day to bring to their puny measurement the designs of the Eternal. Our patience soon wearies, and faintheartedness enfeebles us.

But look at Moses; his faith does not fail, he endures, as seeing Him who is invisible. Years pass by and his hair whitens, but he never doubts the faithfulness of the Almighty, and the near triumph of his cause which he is serving from afar in exile. So when his two sons were born in Midian, he named one Gershon, and the other Eleazer, names which mean, as the Scripture tells us, the one, "I was a stranger there," and the other, "The Almighty will be my help."

And as Moses believed, deliverance came when human patience seemed exhausted. Standing one day before the burning bush, he heard these words, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children

of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you." The exile of Midian was to become the conqueror of Pharaoh; and from the summits of Horeb and Sinai, where he had so often wandered a fugitive disowned by his people, he was to appear in the majesty of his historic *rôle*, in the splendor of his glory, so that the Israelites, amazed, should not be able to endure the brightness, as they exclaim, "He has been with God."

And now the hour of his triumph has come. The whole people are moved by Moses' voice and promise to obey him. The passover is celebrated, the Red sea is crossed, and over against its raging waters which cover the Egyptian army, this song of deliverance resounds;—"The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation. The Lord is a man of war. Pharaoh's chariots and his hosts hath He cast into the sea; his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea; the depths have covered them; they sank into the bottom as a stone.

"The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil: my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with

Thy wind, the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters" (Exod. xv.).

While the people were filled with rapture in repeating these words, Moses might well believe that their deliverance was accomplished, and that on the morrow he would enter the promised land.

To-morrow! But this is to leave out of account human ingratitude. On the morrow, in the face of formidable difficulties, Moses was to learn for what God had so long been preparing him. Foolish is he who trusts in the enthusiasm of the multitude. Here are the very people who chafed under the oppression of Egypt, and were overjoyed at the thought of liberty. Yes, they are the same; yet listen now to their murmurings. "Why did you bring us out of the land of Egypt? There we had to eat and in abundance."

Oh, ye people, ye are ever the same! Here I read the history of my own times. How often in our day have we heard these same enthusiastic cries! Men have put away strange gods, have torn asunder political and religious fetters, and full of courage have set out on the march to the promised land. But they find liberty is stern and must be paid for at its own

price. The path is steep, the desert parched and dry. Then begin their cowardly regrets and murmurings, as they look back towards Egypt, and with curses for those they had extolled, rush again into bondage, just as they had plunged into liberty.

The trials of Moses were renewed each day. At each step his work is imperilled. First, the people were without bread, then they had no water, desertions increased, those whom he trusted most were the very ones to revolt, and at critical moments he stands alone in face of an idolatrous people. He sees them, even at the foot of the mountain where the holy law had first been proclaimed, make a golden calf and say: "Israel, here is the God who has delivered thee." He sees them participating in the shameless festivities of neighboring tribes, or trembling like leaves on hearing that the enemy was preparing to defend Canaan. At times his soul, weary with such murmuring and cowardice, bowed beneath the burden. Who will lift him up and give him new hope and courage? He who is invisible, and who says to him, "Go, for I am with thee." Since it is not from men he has received his commission, he expects



from them no reward; and their impatience, revolts and ingratitude will not shake his firmness.

You who are called of God to guide your fellow-men, leaders of the people, magistrates, heads of factories, pastors of souls, do you comprehend what such an example should teach you? And who among us cannot profit by it? What position in life is there, however humble, in which one does not feel the burden of some soul seeking guidance, of some life which should be saved? Fathers and mothers of families, teachers on whom rests the noble task of educating the young, all you who know what it costs to perform with fidelity this mission, so grand, yet so thankless, learn from Moses to endure, as seeing Him who is invisible. Oh! that the duty may seem grand, and the humblest ministry sacred, when, instead of a merely human obligation, it is recognized as a divine investiture, a priesthood which comes from above.

It is in this spirit we must struggle here below, serving those to whom God sends us, but looking above them for the approval which sustains us, and for the rule of our conscience. Unhappy he who, called to lead his fellows, when the trying moment comes, is guided by the

whims and favor of the fickle multitude. Foolish above all are the ministers of the Gospel, who strive to please men, to accommodate revealed truth to changing tastes, to personal theories, to the prejudices of their day, and then boast of their success. As well might the pilot, amid the fierce winds and fearful blackness of a stormy night, search for his course on the face of the waters tossing in fast and furious billows, instead of looking to the compass which points him above the thick fogs to where the steadfast north star shines.

Christians, it is upward that you must look for light and strength. The tempests may beat against you; men may reject you; prejudice, jealousy, and malice may league against you; slander may cast its poisoned dart at your feet, and you may hear the stinging hisses of bitter calumny. All this may well cause you to suffer; for it is inexpressibly bitter to feel one's self misunderstood, misjudged; and for a heart longing for sympathy, this isolation is full of anguish and often of terror. But you must endure, and above the gloom of the present hour, with eyes turned heavenward, you will see Him who is invisible, and whose love will never fail you!

Brethren, let us understand well our mission. We must prove to this realistic age, that the invisible alone can save the world. This century boasts that it believes only what it can see and touch. Proud of its conquests and progress, intoxicated with the triumphs of science, it sees reality only there; everything else is a chimera and vain dream. To know the visible is its wisdom, to deal with the visible is its work, to enjoy the visible is its happiness. Everything beside vanishes before its eyes. Hear with what haughty and mocking accents it speaks of the supernatural doctrines which, according to it, have long bewildered humanity and paralyzed its progress! If it upholds religion, it is only on the score of utility, for the sake of the weak minds and the wretched classes who may find some consolation in it. It reduces the Church to nothing but a vast philanthropic association. Everything which transcends this level is but a barren fantasy. In its view, humanity when freed from this unwieldy load will march proudly on to the conquest of the future.

It must be reiterated emphatically that if there yet remains upon our poor earth any living principle, any consolation, any strong hope,—we

owe it to those who, like Moses, have walked by faith and not by sight. Conscience, duty, and right are not things visible. The positive philosophy so vaunted in this day will never evolve from its experience a single one of these fundamental and eternal principles, which alone can enlighten man. When you can cast into the crucible of your laboratory a bit of mud and extract gold from it, you may be able to extract, from the crucible of the materialism of our times, the law of conscience and the inflexible authority of duty. Duty, what has it to do here? Materialism does not recognize it. The law of materialism is force; here is its first principle, its perpetual motor. No, the moral law, shining with its absolute authority, is not the result of experience. As conscience, in affirming duty, transcends the visible world, so the human heart asserts by its profoundest wants, the reality of that which is beyond the terrestrial horizon.

Confine humanity to this present life alone, bounded by the cradle and the grave, leaving it no escape out into eternity, and this earth of which you would make a paradise will soon be converted into a hell. How will you prevent

those who suffer, who consider themselves the oppressed of the earth, from seeking in this short space called life, all the happiness this earth can, as they will say, and ought to give them? How will you impose silence upon these men of rapacious passions who are all the bolder for believing themselves justifiable? Will you resort to force? But then the future will be a savage combat between the rich and the poor, a war of classes, relapsing into that struggle for life, of which science has made, as they tell us, the law which rules the world; in other words it will be a return to barbarism. There are signs enough to put us on our guard. Never did the blood of our people flow down our streets as in this century of brotherhood. In 1870, surrounded by a material prosperity, which seemed likely to be enduring, in speaking of those doctrines which deny a future life, I showed how that nihilism (*le néant*) in the world of souls logically produced the annihilation of society. One year later, I repeated those words in Paris then in flames. In the baleful light of our burning monuments one could comprehend that it is only faith in an invisible world which will save the present world.

Moses' task is accomplished. He endured to the end; once only did his heart fail him; the Scriptures do not tell us clearly what was his fault, only that it was the cause of his not reaching the promised land, upon which he could only gaze from afar. Strange frankness of the Bible! Not one of its heroes is represented as faultless, save Him who was without sin, the holy and just One, who died for the unjust. All others have their errors and their faults, and some like David have fallen even into crime. The knowledge is needful, lest we render that worship to man which belongs to God alone, and lest also we place the heroes of faith in a sphere above the need of that grace which pardons, and ourselves despair of ever imitating them.

However this may be, if the death of Moses on Mount Nebo is a result of the justice of God, I see in it also a result of His great mercy, for it has pleased Him to teach us therein a sublime lesson, so that Moses dying yet speaks to us. And what is the lesson? To endure, even when God refuses us our earthly hopes—yea, even when we must die in sight of the happiness of which we have dreamed.

The great leader of Israel reached at last the

end toward which he had been moving for forty years. Before him lay the promised land, beyond the waters of the Jordan. He saw the sacred soil upon which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had worshipped the living God, and where their tombs awaited Israel. It was there the Kingdom of God was to be established, there Moses would forget the many struggles and trials of his long ministry, there would he find at last the realization of his fondest desires, the reward of all his toils. To kiss that holy ground, to build there the tabernacle of Jehovah, was his sublime ambition, his supreme joy. But God said to him, "Get thee to the top of the mountain; look upon the land of your fathers; but thou shalt not enter therein."

Let us dwell upon these last words, my brethren. The promised land is not here below. Ah! you know it well, ye aged who hear me, and you who, yet young, have encountered one of those trials which forever embitter existence. Recall life's early promise and compare with it what life has given you. Alas! what more has it yet to give? Joys perhaps! God keep me from despising these. God keep me from forgetting all the earthly blessing, and legitimate

pleasure He has in store. Would I might promise you such, and be only the prophet of happiness! but we do not fill the Christian pulpit to proclaim idyls; and the sad experience of all ages teaches us that for the souls which hunger and thirst after truth, righteousness, and love, the great crises of life are marked by delusions; delusions of the understanding, which has believed it has grasped the truth, and finds instead but feeble flickering rays; delusions of conscience, which has believed in the early victory of good, in the triumph of righteousness, but is grieved to find the struggle continue and so many failures to be endured; delusions of the heart, which groans at finding the shallowness of human affections and selfishness hidden under the fairest words, or which after lavishing the deepest love upon cherished idols sees them ruthlessly torn away by death; delusions with respect to ourselves, delusions with respect to others, delusions upon delusions.

Ah! if the worldling alone encountered these trials, we might understand how after expecting so much from the visible world, he should receive from it the nothingness which is the end of all things earthly. But must I say



it? to the believer also, this life is a school of bitter disenchantment, of continual despoilment. Surely I do not forget the infinite compensations which God mingles with it, and the certain and triumphant joy which is the supreme recompense of faith. But it is not upon this earth that the believer will receive these, and St. Paul was the first to say that if our Christian hopes were for this life only, we would be of all men most miserable. Yes, the most miserable, because the higher and holier the dream, the more pitiable the delusion, the more cruel the awakening. What a distance between that which we had hoped to see on earth, and that which we do see every day! what a gulf between the ideal and the real church! what a contrast between that charity which St. Paul has pictured, and that which we call charity in this present time! What painful contradictions between our words and our acts!

No, it is not here below that we should build our home. The promised land is beyond the veil. It is for us to press toward it without wearying, to overcome evil with good, to hope even against hope, and to endure to the end as seeing Him who is invisible. Amen.



III.

The Vision of Elijah.



### III.

## The Vision of Elijah.

*“The Lord said to Elijah; Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake.*

*“And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.*

*“And it was so when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out.”*

I KINGS xix. 11-13.

ONE of the most striking proofs of the sad ignorance which prevails in our country upon the subject of the Holy Scriptures, is the heedlessness with which judgment is passed upon the God of the Old Testament. I speak not only of that disparaging criticism, which from the second century has assailed the most sublime scenes in the Bible, and which, without even trying to understand their meaning, finds in them material

for low mockery; I speak, as well, of a science which professes to be more serious. I am astonished at the prejudices to which it yields.

Thus, because the Scriptures, with an inflexible straightforwardness, with a holy candor, recite the weaknesses, the artifices and the lapses of Abraham, of Jacob, of Moses, of David, of all the heroes of the Jewish people, whose national pride if it had dictated the book, would have been far from painting them in such colors, there is no hesitation in tracing their faults and crimes even to the God whom they worshipped, without inquiring whether He approved these acts, without noticing that He condemned them, and that the offenders all passed through the sad and severe school of trial and repentance.

So, again, because Jehovah in His providential dealings with humanity, uses for a time the people of Israel as an instrument, subjects them to the yoke of the theocracy, and consequently to a system of laws which, like all laws, civil and political, must be enforced by penalty, men pretend to see in Jehovah only a God of vengeance, they attribute to Him the narrownesses, the hatreds, the bad passions which Israel mingled with the accomplishment of its providential

mission; and they forget that, even at that time, under the veil of the theocracy, His true nature, the recognition of His universal justice, His love and His mercy, shone forth in a thousand places in the Old Testament,—that there breathes in it sometimes a benignity, a tenderness wholly evangelical, and that in listening to many passages of the prophets, one can imagine himself already at the feet of Jesus Christ. What! because this God of Israel, revealing Himself in His Son, has shed upon us His light in its fulness, shall we despise the divine clearness with which He illumined the former covenant? Shall the light of the sun at noonday make us forget the splendors of the sunrise? No, my brethren; under the shadows with which He was yet surrounding Himself, we worship the God of Abraham, of Moses, of Elijah, and of David, because for us He is and will ever be, the God of Jesus Christ.

This thought was suggested to me by the narrative from which I have chosen my text, and I do not hesitate to say that in meditating upon it and in comprehending its true sense, you will see here, as I do, a sublime presentiment of that final revelation of the gospel by

which God makes Himself known to us just as He is.

This narrative is taken from the history of Elijah. Elijah is the true type of the heroes of the theocracy. In a time of degradation, of universal idolatry, he was possessed with the thought of the glory of God. This passion consumes him, he knows no other. He would re-establish the reign of Jehovah; and in this mission nothing stops him, no tie of flesh or blood. Like John the Baptist, who nine centuries later will become the heir to his name and his work, he grows up in the desert. He leaves it to appear in the palace of Ahab, to proclaim there the divine threatenings, and his voice then resounds like thunder; the judgments of God accompany it, and such is his power, that the whole people hang upon his word; he challenges the priests of Baal, exposes their deceit and puts them to death without pity. Then he can believe that the reign of the Lord has come, for the people proclaim Him, and for one whole day the echoes of Carmel reverberate with the cry of the multitude, "Jehovah is God, Jehovah is God."

But, O grief! after the enthusiasm of a day,



the course of the world is resumed. Ahab is still Ahab, Jezebel is still Jezebel, and the crowd, for a moment borne along by the fervor of the prophet, returns with insatiable zeal to the debasement of a bloody and voluptuous worship. Then Elijah, like all ardent souls, passes from one extreme to the other; discouragement seizes him; his faith is obscured; God forsakes him, the ways of the Almighty are incomprehensible to him; he charges God with forgetting His cause. How easy for Him to interpose, to strike with thunder those who scorn Him, and thus to complete the work of destruction begun at Carmel!

But no! the heavens remain closed, God keeps silent, Jezebel is still in power and the life of the prophet is threatened. Elijah in despair flies; he is weary of life; he hastens to bury himself in the desert. He travels toward the south, far from that land of Judea where he has fought in vain, far from that ungrateful and frivolous people; he journeys even to Horeb; he needs that great desert, those barren and desolate heights, that sad and wild nature which responds to the condition of his soul. There it is that he wishes to die. And when the voice of God, which follows him even to his retreat, calls

out to him, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" he answers Him with a bitter complaint, and he reproaches Him for having abandoned His cause, and, after calling him to the most terrible of struggles, for having left him to fight alone.

My brethren, let us not judge the prophet. Even in his despair I recognize the zeal which burns within him; his temptation is that of great souls,—souls whom the thirst for righteousness and holiness consumes. Would to God that even at the price of errors such as his, we might see to-day believers who resemble him!

Indifferent souls will understand nothing of this revolt of Elijah; as they are possessed with no high ideal, as the coming of God's kingdom is the least of their cares, as the cause of righteousness and truth never enkindles them, they fall in easily with the course of the world, and they have taken the position of being unable to change it. Wisdom for them consists in taking men as they are, and moderation seems to them the best and most prudent of all philosophies. Why want to reform the world, why want to excite against one's self prejudices and passions, when one can live happily and quietly? They treat as fanaticism everything which goes

beyond them, and the Elijahs of whatever period seem to them as madmen. But if a man ardently desires the triumph of the truth, if he suffers in seeing the name of God disowned, His glory degraded, and righteousness trampled under foot, he will recognize in this story his own history, and in the groanings of the prophet the expression of his own grief.

Thus, as I picture it to myself, the Christians of the first centuries must have been tempted when, after having expected with the whole primitive church, the immediate return of Jesus Christ and His glorious appearing, they saw the truth combated and often rejected, compelled slowly to win souls one by one, to plead its cause before Cæsars;—when they saw the church growing with difficulty and subjected to the conditions of all human institutions, having like them, its weaknesses, its miseries, its failures, and counting, in time of persecution, its apostates by thousands.

So, moreover, must our fathers have been tempted, after the days of Reformation, when, after having fondly hoped for their country the free and earnest religion of the conscience delivered from the yoke of men, and that grand future

which the Gospel alone could have given it, they had to see their temples razed to the ground, their firesides destroyed, their Bibles torn to pieces, and themselves like malefactors following the road to exile. Who will tell us of the anxious looks those noble outlaws had to turn toward that God who seemed to desert His cause? Who will tell us of their mournful prayers, their repinings, their groanings full of bitterness?

And so even are they tempted who—having hoped to witness with their own eyes the triumph of the gospel, the extension of the church, the union of Christians embracing each other at the foot of the Master's cross, in short one of those great religious movements which save souls and the world—are forced to see what we see; that is to say, in the face of a society indifferent and ready to scoff, the church divided, feeble, without high impulse, without enthusiasm, and the progress of the kingdom of God depending apparently upon chances wholly external and causes wholly human.—Now before such a spectacle, faith wavers, hearts are troubled, one begins to doubt like Elijah that God is intervening and acting; like Elijah one

forgets the magnificent traces of His intervention in the past, and if to these general causes of trouble is added some especial trial,—a long injustice under which one groans, a cruel inexplicable blow,—it is enough to extort from the strongest a cry of anguish and of murmuring, to drive them perhaps to despair.

Ye Christians, who know these temptations, you know also how terrible they are. Well, let me tell you nevertheless that here are noble griefs! Ah! what would be worse than this, would be for you to take your part with the passing world, to find yourselves at ease in a world where God is treated as a stranger, to see with unfeeling heart the injustice, the sufferings, the shames which greet us at every step, to accept this life and the world such as sin has made them. The gospel has said, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness.” Yes, to suffer like Elijah, like John the Baptist, like Paul, is after all the best and greatest thing on earth, for it is on this condition alone that one can find Divine consolation. Let us see how God teaches Elijah, and let us seek here our strength.

And God said to Elijah, “Go forth and stand

upon the mount before the Lord." The prophet obeys. Standing on the summit of Horeb where his view would embrace the desert and the sky, he waited, for the Lord was about to appear to him and speak to him.

He looks, and behold clouds of dust arise on the horizon; it is the wind of the desert which rises rapidly, impetuously, as it does in the East. Soon the sky is covered with a sombre and livid veil. To the long and gloomy gusts follow the bursts of a fearful tempest; the trees sway and are uprooted, the very rocks shake, the sand of the desert rolls in moving billows, like the waves of an angry sea. The storm passes, but the Lord was not in the wind.

He looks again, and behold to his dazed eyes the horizon seems to move, the rocks tremble, the earth opens, the mountain, as if seized with dizziness, sways upon its foundations; it is an earthquake which opens abysses, which seem as if they would engulf everything; for some moments nature is the prey of this terrible convulsion; but the Lord was not in this earthquake.

Elijah looks again, and behold a strange light illumines the expanse, fire from heaven inflames the earth. The reddish flame of the

burning, shining in the middle of the night of the tempest, spreads rapidly as lightning, it runs, it winds around the sides of the mountain, it kindles the dry herbs, the trees uprooted by the wind. It is soon a deluge of fire which overflows everything, and whose glowing waves whirl upward toward the black vault of the sky. Elijah, terrified, recoils; but the Lord was not in the fire.

The storm, the earthquake, the fire—was it not this that Elijah had asked, when groaning and discouraged, he reproached the Lord for His inaction and His incomprehensible silence? Did he not say to Him in some sort, “Awake Thou! Take Thy cause in hand, sweep away Thine enemies like the sand of the desert, crush them in Thy fury, consume them like chaff?” Well, this irresistible and formidable power, he has seen it in the hurricane which carried everything in its rapid breath, in the earth shaken to its depths, and in the fire devouring all that the tempest had left in its path! He has seen it, he has trembled, and the Lord was not there. Where then is He, and by what sign can Elijah discern His presence? The prophet is about to know.

The terrible vision of the storm has passed. The blast of the tempest has abated. Calm has succeeded the convulsions of the hurricane; to the frightful flashes of lightning follows the pure fresh clearness of the day. The sky has reappeared, the sky of the East with its transparent deep blue; nature seems to be born again more beautiful, more serene, and from the depths of the valleys there rises even to the summit of Horeb, to the grotto where Elijah has taken refuge, a soft, low sound, the harmonious voice of nature expanding anew under the breath of God. Elijah goes forth from his retreat. An inexpressible emotion seizes his soul which terror had agitated, an ineffable feeling of peace, of freshness and of joy penetrates it. Neither the noise of the tempest, nor the convulsions of nature had so stirred it. In this soft low sound he recognized the presence of God, and covering his head with his mantle, he bows himself and worships.

And now, my brethren, am I wrong in saying it? Is there not in this scene from the Old Testament a sublime presentiment of the supreme revelation which God should give to humanity through the gospel? This God whose



presence Elijah knew not how to discern save in His acts of justice and wrath—this God full of vengeance, since He smites so often, chastises so much, He has not spoken His last word. He makes of the winds His angels and of the flames of fire His ministers, but nevertheless He is not in the overthrowing tempest nor in the consuming fire; and, if the law of Sinai, if the theocracy of Israel, have revealed His holiness and justice to the world, some day He must make known to it that His name is love.

Elijah will not yet comprehend the deep and true meaning of this vision which transcends him, and in that which follows the Almighty reveals Himself to him but in part. He tells him to return on his way and join Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha, all three of whom will be the instruments of His vengeance, who will soon chastise Ahab, Jezebel, and the idolatrous people. Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha, that is the wind, the earthquake and the fire which the Almighty will send when He thinks best: so God will interpose, the day of His anger will come at last; but Elijah must know that vengeance will not be His last word. In these terrible interventions God

will not reveal Himself wholly, and His true revelation is yet to come.

My brethren, we have contemplated this revelation. What is the good news represented by the soft and quiet sound which the prophet heard? Listen, and in the night, the memory of which we celebrate this evening,<sup>1</sup> hear the holy songs of the angels from the skies, descending upon the plains of Bethlehem: "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good-will to men." Draw nigh to this cradle where the majesty of God is laid aside, contemplate this little babe born among the poorest; no splendor surrounds Him; nothing averts you from Him, nothing terrifies you; all is simple and without show; and yet it is there that the God of earth and heaven truly reveals Himself, and from this humble cradle of Bethlehem will go forth the salvation of the world. He will grow, He whose birth will pass almost unnoticed; He will shoot up like a feeble stem, according to the word of the prophet; He will have no outward *éclat*, nothing which would recall the terrible majesty of that God of vengeance whom Elijah invoked: instead of a sceptre of iron of the Mes-

<sup>1</sup> Preached Christmas Eve, 1865.

siah dreamed of by the Jews, He will carry a reed; instead of a conqueror's diadem, a crown of thorns; His voice will not menace like the thunder and the tempest, it will bring pardon, peace, and salvation.

"Come unto Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart." He will have only prayers for His enemies, blessings for his executioners. He will be despised, covered with insults, overwhelmed with ignominy, nailed upon the accursed tree, —but in this extreme humiliation He will reveal to the world an inconceivable greatness: that of victorious love, that of charity which stoops even to sacrifice. A majesty which nothing can approach will surround His bleeding head, and in this victim disarmed humanity will recognize its King. That which neither force, terror, nor violence could do, His cross will accomplish, —consciences will be moved, hearts will be touched, the church will be founded, a new humanity will be born, and the reign of God on earth will begin. The church will increase, having for her device, "faith, love, and hope;" she will take possession of the nations; after eighteen centuries she will preach the glad tidings of salvation in all parts of the world, awaiting the

day when upon the pacified earth there will be but one Shepherd and one flock. O my brethren, in presence of this marvellous triumph of redeeming love, let us bow our heads, let us worship as Elijah did, for truly the Almighty is here.

Thus we have seen the true sense of this sublime vision, we know what means the soft low sound which filled the soul of Elijah with a holy trembling, we know that God is love.

And now it remains for us to draw from this scene some of the instructions that God has hidden therein.

First of all, let us learn not to judge the Almighty. Often, as we have said, the delays of God astonish us, His silence appears to us inexplicable. "Why does He not interpose?" we ask, why does He leave His cause questioned, assailed and perhaps vanquished? Why does He permit evil to triumph and to spread? And without our lips avowing it, our irritated impatient hearts call for His intervention, His judgment and perhaps His anger. His anger, ah! my brethren, Elijah in provoking it did not know what we know, for he had not seen the Holy One and the Just expire on the cross: he had not seen

mercy stronger than hate conquering hearts and founding the kingdom of God on earth. His anger! And what could we answer if it should strike us first? Do we merit it less than those who provoke us? When we take into consideration the favors we have received, the light which has illumined us, the patience which has upheld us, the deliverance of which we have been the objects, when to this wonderful history of divine mercies, we oppose that of our resistance, our ingratitude, our cowardice, our secret faults, and perhaps our crimes, can we, my brethren, dare we again invoke the God of vengeance? Let us rejoice rather that the hour of justice delays to strike, let us rejoice that for others as for ourselves, there remains time to repent, time for salvation. Let us remember that the anger of man does not accomplish the justice of God, and to overcome evil, let us imitate that divine Providence, which, while able to subdue by force, aims above all to triumph by love.

Beside this admonition, I find in my text a thought full of consolation. Who among us in the presence of the history of humanity and of his own history has not sometimes felt the chill

of doubt possess him, because he has sought in vain the interposition of God? Who among us has not wished at such a time to ask of God His secret, yes, the secret of those strange mysterious voices which confound him? Ah well! this secret God reveals to us in the vision of Elijah, this secret is love. Love is the final and supreme explanation of all that God has done in the history of humanity and in our own history, love and not anger, love and not vengeance, however our heart at times may have thought it.

Nevertheless, my brethren, let us ever remember that if it is only in love that God reveals Himself wholly, it is He who sends the wind, the earthquake, and the devouring fire. Let us beware, lest, because we believe the gospel, we disarm the hand of the Almighty and make for ourselves of Him an ideal, weak, effeminate, altogether like the spirit of this generation. No, for us also the Almighty reigns; for us He dwells in the heart of history, and ordains and controls the disturbances which are agitating the world. And are there not certain pages of that history where the intervention of His justice becomes visible in some sort, and

where, like Belshazzar at his feast in Babylon, we discern a mysterious hand which writes the death sentence of powerful iniquities? When Nineveh or Babylon crumble, when those gigantic empires disappear, do we not see there the intervention of God? When Jerusalem, murderer of Jesus Christ, is trampled under the feet of the Gentiles, when the plough passes over the site of its superb temple, and fugitive Israel is dispersed in the world, there to astonish history by its unique, extraordinary destiny, do we not see here the fulfilment of those fearful words: "His blood be on us and on our children?"

When Rome itself, whose downfall St. John, the seer of the Apocalypse, had prophesied four centuries before, is invaded by the Barbarians, and its destroyers Attila or Genseric, fulfilling a mysterious destiny, call themselves the scourge of God, and in embarking say to their pilot, "Loose the sail there where divine vengeance blows," can we ignore therein the action of a revenging Providence, and if we forget it, will not the smoking ruins which everywhere mark their passage proclaim it in our stead?

When, finally, in modern history we see all the powers which have made war upon Chris-

tianity and which have rejected it, entering fatally the road to decay and death, while civilization, progress, respect of conscience, true liberty exist only under the shadow of the cross and where the gospel has entered into the life of the people;—when everything shows, even as it was nobly confessed the other day in a proclamation by the president of a great republic where one does not blush to invoke the name of the living God,<sup>1</sup>—when everything shows us that righteousness elevates nations, and that sin is the ruin of peoples, we must be blind to deny that God acts even in the darkest days of history, and that it is He who unchains, as in the vision of Elijah, the tempest and the devouring fire.

Yes, God reigns; this truth must be acknowledged, must be proclaimed aloud before a civilization which is intoxicated by its material progress and professes such scornful indifference, such insulting contempt for the realities of the invisible world. It must be reminded that it cannot with impunity do without Him, and that, if His place remains vacant, there are powers of evil which will fill it. It must be reminded that

<sup>1</sup> Allusion to the message of President Johnson.



His justice slumbers not, although it seems to, and that in order to chastise nations who forget Him, He has but to abandon them a single day to the evil passions which are fermenting in their depths, to that rising tide of materialism, to which He alone can say, "Thou shalt go no farther." It must be reminded that the corruption of manners flaunted by the higher classes, and displaying itself in an insolent luxury, kindles in the lower classes hatreds and savage passions whose explosion would produce a moral tempest in comparison with which, what Elijah witnessed on Horeb would be but child's play. It must be reminded that God is holy, that He is not to be trifled with, and that, for individuals as for peoples, His judgment is the most certain of realities.

Yes, God reigns in history; but if we believe in His sovereign action, how many times also in history do we lose trace of His steps! How often the spectacle that this world presents is to us but a labyrinth where we lose ourselves! And, in His judgments even, how many things seem to us inexplicable! Alas! in the tempests which the breath of His justice raises, I see the innocent struck down with the

guilty, I see children expiating the crimes of their fathers, I see the consequences of an iniquity visited upon several generations; I see a mysterious fatality weighing upon individuals or upon peoples, I see fortunate strokes of strength and skill succeed, while good causes perish; so that while knowing on the one hand that all these events, even those which perplex me, are sent of God, I feel on the other hand, with no less of demonstration, that God is not altogether there. Ah! it is then that the vision which Elijah saw brings me a beneficent and truly divine light, for, if it shows me that God sends these afflictions which chastise the world, it teaches me at the same time that His chastenings do not make us to know Him such as He is, it teaches me that the secret of His ways is elsewhere, that it is entirely in that love which history does not teach me, but that God reveals Himself in silence to the pardoned soul which believes in His word, which listens and lets itself learn of Him.

Grasp these consolations, afflicted souls. You groan perhaps to-day under the weight of the trial; it seems as if God has directed against you all His power, and in your life you have

seen realized all that is terrible in the vision of Elijah. The wind of affliction has swept away your hopes, your happiness has vanished in a day of mourning, and your heart is passing through what the Scripture calls the furnace of grief. You were told to seek God in those blows which struck you, but your heart shuddered, and like Elijah, you yet waited. Ah! you are right, for though these trials have been determined of God, it is not here always that He will reveal to you His will and His innermost thought. Have faith! the day draws near when you will hear the still small voice which fell upon the ear of the prophet, that secret voice of the Almighty which alone appeases the soul in revolt and brings to it unspeakable consolations. You will hear it and you will know then that love was at the bottom of all His dispensations, that love alone can explain your sorrows, you will know it, and bowing with Elijah and veiling your face, you will say: "Truly the Lord is here."

My brethren, when Elijah had witnessed this vision on Horeb, the voice of the Almighty spoke to him and said, "Go, return by way of the wilderness to Damascus." Return! That

was the word he had need to hear, he who in a time of danger had deserted his post and his mission. Return by way of the wilderness. By that road which he should never have taken, for it was not to the desert God had called him. Return to those before whom thou oughtest to have served me as a witness! Return to those places where hatred, scorn, and persecutions await thee. Return, for if I have strengthened thy faith, and lifted up thy fainting heart in showing Myself to thee on the holy mountain, it is not that thy spirit may dwell there wrapped in ecstasy, it is that thou mayst go away, more firm and faithful, to serve Me in this world which forgets Me and which is perishing.

Well! let us listen to this command of God, and let it be our strength. We have come here discouraged, perhaps, and groaning like Elijah; with him we have learned once more the secret of the divine ways; but happier than he, we have seen the love which Jesus has revealed to the world and which is for us the supreme word, and the ultimate explanation of whatever happens to us.

Let us return then, my brethren, ourselves,

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to the post of duty; let us return to those wandering souls, to that frivolous society, to that unbelieving world, in the midst of which God wants us to be His witnesses. Let us return to the world to be humble, courageous and faithful in it, let us return to bring to it a revived faith, a brighter hope, a stronger and more persevering love. Let us return to it, that this world may learn in hearing our words, in contemplating our works, that we have climbed like Elijah the holy mountain and that there we have heard the Almighty. Amen.



IV.

The Light of the World.





#### IV.

### The Light of the World.

*"I am the light of the world."*

JOHN viii. 12.

"I AM the light of the world." Have you ever paused, my brethren, before these words? Have you compared the impression which they must have made when they were spoken for the first time with what we feel in hearing them to-day?

On a certain day in history, in an ignorant country, amid an insignificant, conquered people whose name awakened among greater nations only a feeling of contempt, and whose degenerate language was nothing but a barbarous *patois*, a man whom they called the rabbi of Nazareth uttered in the hearing of a few poor ignorant persons and with an amazing boldness, these extraordinary words: "I am the light of

the world." He did not pretend simply to enlarge the luminous circle of humanity, by driving back the shadows before the victorious light of some new truths. It was not simply one light more which he announced, an advance added to all the other advances; it was light in the absolute, eternal, infinite sense of this word. And, observe, that in assuming to bring it to men, He does not say, "I announce the light, I reveal the light," but "*I am the light*"; it is not His doctrine only, it is His life, it is His entire being that He holds up to the gaze of the human race, and of which He means to make the eternal focus whose light shall illuminate their darkness.

Measure well the whole compass of these words, the whole extent of the claim which they express, and imagine to yourselves what a contemporary of Jesus must have thought, a philosopher of Athens or of Rome, in listening to these words preserved by a few Galileans who scarcely comprehended them. Folly! would this sage have said; and the Pharisees of Jerusalem, as St. John relates, expressed the same idea in their Jewish tongue when they said of Jesus, "He is possessed of a devil."

Now let eighteen hundred years roll by; look

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well at the world, look at it, I do not say as Christians with what might be called the prejudices of the believer, look at it as impartial witnesses, and you will be obliged to acknowledge that these words, which seemed foolish, are to-day the simple expression of a historic fact radiant with evidence. Jesus is so truly the light of the world that outside of those regions where His light has spread, there is no progress, no civilization, no faith in the future; the shadow of fatalism falls and rests there.

To-day in the two hemispheres, in the new as well as in the old world, millions of creatures rise at the name of Jesus and hail Him as the sun of souls. Here, too, in this assembly, poor or rich, ignorant or learned, separated perhaps in all other respects, we are united in this common experience; to-day our prayers and our songs have affirmed it, joining together in the grand canticle which the Christian church raises everywhere to her chief. Jesus is the light of the world. That is what our Christian brethren say, scattered everywhere over the earth. At first they said it because they had been taught it; but suddenly their voice trembled; the truth of tradition became to them a truth of experi-

ence. They said it with tears of joy and in the outbursts of sublime admiration. They have said it, they reiterate it, not only in a time of enthusiasm and in the intoxication of happiness, but oftenest perhaps in the hours when all human illusions grow pale and vanish before the stern realities of life. When the cold and livid shadows of temptation, of sorrow and of death, come upon them, there suddenly breaks through their darkness, the light which comes from Christ. Many of those who have denied Him in their joys, recognize Him in their suffering; many who have blasphemed Him in the pride of their strength, bless Him in their anguish and find in Him alleviation of their agony.

It is a story which happens every day, every hour, of which each of us may have been a witness, and which will repeat itself before this day is ended. Hence these words, which seemed senseless, have become a truth which if it were not sacred would be called trite; the impossible has become the real, the supernatural has become for us a thing altogether natural, the extraordinary has become habitual, and so habitual that our dulled vision and stupid hearts perceive no longer in it its strange and divine character.

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Christ said, "I am the light of the world," and to Him may well be applied the famous saying: "He is like the sun, blind is he who sees Him not." "Behold," says the book of Psalms, in speaking of the star of day, "it rises in one extremity of the heavens and finishes its course in the other; there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." And we contemplating the splendor of our Christ, the sun of our souls, we will say, He has risen in the east, and the west has hailed His glory, but shall not hail His decline; all nations shall see Him and shall leap for joy; none can escape from His light and warmth; not even the sceptic who believes that night is come because he has closed his eyes to the light; not even the rebellious unbeliever, who says to Christ, that His glory is dead and His reign is over.

I have recalled, my brethren, an undisputed fact. It is this fact that we are to study to-day. Let us inquire, first of all, in what sense Jesus wished to be called the light of the world, and what is the domain in which He diffuses His light.

When one speaks to-day of *light* in any other than the material sense, he almost always under-

stands by that expression scientific truth, such as is comprehended exclusively by the intellect. And as in this age the sciences which have physical nature for their object, have made enormous development, it is to their progress that the minds of our day attach themselves with zeal; they admire them, they extol them, they expect from them the true explanation of our destiny, and the solution of all the problems with which we find ourselves engaged. Now it is evident, my brethren, that the gospel does not occupy itself with these questions; Jesus Christ—and it is one of the most original features in His teaching—has never rested on what is properly called science; He has never pretended to solve problems of this kind; I defy you to point out to me among all His discourses a single one which has the character of a scientific demonstration. The impression which His words make does not recall in any way that which one feels in human schools; the kind of persuasion which they produce is of an entirely different nature from that which is produced in us by the proof of a mathematical axiom, or the accord of a phenomenon with a natural law.

I know that very often Christians have over-

looked this character, so profoundly original, of the gospel; they have attempted to modify it. The scholasticism of the middle ages was a great effort, attempted by men of genius, to reduce Christianity to purely scientific propositions, demonstrated by the syllogism. It was thus that the great Thomas Aquinas, for example, treated the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It seems that the Christians of those days were ashamed of the scientific poverty of the gospel, as the scholars of the Renaissance were ashamed of its literary poverty, and forced themselves to hide the simplicity of its style under the tinsel that they borrowed from the tongue of Cicero. In our day I see many men, young men especially, troubled by the thought that the gospel and science are incompatible; they are told that Christianity supposes an entire cosmogony now obsolete, that one must admit that if the earth be immovable, if the sun crosses the sky, if the firmament be a solid blue surface studded with stars of gold, Jesus introduced nothing new, that He has given us a childish idea of God; that in teaching the efficacy of prayer, and in pretending to work miracles, He failed to recognize the permanence and the inflexibility of natural laws;

and this suffices to shake their faith. The gospel can no longer give them light: they believe it entirely obsolete since Copernicus, Galileo and Newton,—overlooking the fact that Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton were convinced Christians. It seems to them then that we take pleasure in defying evidence when we assert that the words pronounced by Jesus, “I am the light of the world,” are as true to-day as ever.

I do not pretend, my brethren, you will understand, to deal here with the question of the relation of the gospel to science: I confine myself to recalling the fact, already noted a moment ago, that the gospel, owing nothing to science, stands before it in a peculiar position of quiet independence. I could wish that all Christians were equally convinced of this. What I dread is, not the progress of the natural sciences, but the claim of certain followers of these sciences to include in their province moral and religious problems and to solve these by their peculiar processes; this is what I do not hesitate to call a usurpation.

I can well understand the natural irritation of men of science when they see believers disputing their demonstrations, imposing upon them in the



name of faith arbitrary solutions, and at once casting suspicion on them if their conclusions do not agree with the orthodoxy of the day. I know that they boldly assert their independence, and I assert it with them; I know that they wish that scientific questions be met and solved only by scientific minds and methods.

But this conceded, and conceded distinctly, I ask them in my turn to respect the independence of that other domain which is called that of morals and religion,—a domain which has its own laws, its own method of demonstration and evidence. You cry out against intolerance, and you are right, when it is attempted to impose upon a contemporary master of science, scientific conclusions like those of the middle ages; and yet you are astonished that believers protest, when, postulating as an axiom the principle of the equivalence of forces, you call thought a particular species of cerebral phosphorus, and when you say that vice and virtue are secretions as necessary and natural as sugar or alcohol. As for me, I reply that these two kinds of intolerance are alike, and if I must choose between them, my choice would be the one which does not grossly give the lie

to the instinct of my conscience and to my sense of responsibility.

But I deny that we are reduced to this choice. I believe that Christianity is never called upon to cast an anathema at science. On the contrary, let science grow under the divine benediction. Let it embrace the natural order which belongs to it. We do not reluctantly submit to its progress, we joyfully recognize and hail it. Let it subdue the blind forces of matter, let it throw its iron roads over vast continents, spreading civilization in the deserts, bringing together the ends of the world; let it with the rapidity of lightning carry human thought by a mysterious thread through the depths of the vast ocean; let it say to man if it will, "Reign, slave emancipated from matter, king by thought and by will, reign over this world which I have subjected to thee." We will grant to its pride such a superb ovation, provided it concedes to us that this triumphant king suffers, sins, and dies, and that the science of the nineteenth century remains as ever powerless and disconcerted before these three problems called sin, suffering, and death.

Indeed one cannot be deceived here. All the progress of science has not shed a ray of light

on the problem of problems, I mean to say upon our destiny itself, upon life with its trials, its distractions, its shames and its downfalls, and upon the final dread shipwreck which launches us into the unknown.

They tell us, it is true, that we ought to ignore these questions. The positivist's school dogmatically enjoins it; it asserts that these are idle insoluble questions; it bids humanity to confine itself between the cradle and the tomb, and to know nothing beyond. It does not succeed in this. It will never attain it. It is the honor and grandeur of humanity never to have consented to stifle the voice of its troubled conscience and of its suffering heart. How expiate the evil I have done? Where find consolation in my distress? These are the questions which have agitated and tormented humanity above all others. It has looked to heaven in preference to looking to earth. It has sought the beyond, rather than confine itself to the present. Even in our age when it would seem as if earth would attract and charm it forever, where it has multiplied here below all that can amuse it, where work absorbs it and where pleasures enchant it, it cannot content itself with the

present life, it obstinately raises the problems of the invisible world. In vain it is told that these are questions of no importance; it knows that it will not succeed in escaping them. Tomorrow sickness, poverty, the deceptions of life, an overwhelming bereavement, will make us see the frailty of all which has sufficed us hitherto and will compel us to seek something better, something permanent, eternal. These questions all sufferers propose to themselves; all in turn feel the anguish, all need consolation. There comes a moment when we demand light; yes, light upon these mysteries which haunt us, light in the thick darkness. And when this darkness is that of a troubled conscience, when it is that of death which robs us of a being ardently loved, this need of certainty, of consolation, of hope, is such, that, sooner than stifle it, man will seek to satisfy it with ridiculous and often abject superstitions, and all the jeers of sceptics will not stop then the outburst of his despair.

We must have then an answer to these questions, and this answer the human intellect, depending upon its own resources, is incapable of finding. All history shows with what cour-

age, what perseverance, what obstinacy, it has exhausted itself here. It has not been able to attain any certainty. Is this not true? Has science ever consoled any one? When one's conscience is troubled by remorse will he seek a philosophic consultation with a member of the Institute? When you stand by the side of a death-bed, or follow the path to the cemetery, with a desolate, hopeless heart, does it occur to you to go and cast yourself at the feet of a servant? Does not this seem to you ironical? Oh! bitter derision!

This century has made an idol of science. It is to science that it appeals, it is from it that it seems to await deliverance, light, and peace; and of this idol we must say, as the psalmist said of the idols of wood and stone of his time: "They have mouths but they speak not; eyes have they but they see not; they have ears but they hear not" (Psalm cxxxv. 15-17). Impassive and mute as the sphynx of stone that ancient Egypt placed at the temple gates, it has never spoken to humanity a word of hope, of certainty, of consolation.

Well, it is here that Jesus Christ appears. It is in this night of our destiny that these triumphant words shine forth: "I am the light

of the world." He has not shed light upon the problems of the material world or of pure science; that is the domain which God has left to the investigations of our intellect alone; but He has shed it upon our life itself, upon our struggles, our griefs, our agonies; here is His magnificent and divine work, here is that which belongs to Him alone.

How has He done it? I have told you from the beginning; it was by the manifestation of His person even more than by His doctrine, since He did not say, "I bring the light and the truth," but "*I am* the light and I am the truth." Here, my brethren, I wish to address a few words to those of my hearers for whom Christ is above all a teacher of morals, but who have not yet been able to see in Him the incarnation of God, the very manifestation of divinity. They have often said to us with a tone of candor that I respect, "Why talk so much of the person of Christ? Is it not His doctrine which is the essential thing? If one does as He commands, will he not be sure of pleasing Him? Will he not be in the truth?" I agree with them. Listen then to the teaching of Jesus. Do we not hear Him speaking continually of Himself

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and directing attention to His person? Does He ask simply an assent to His precepts? No, evidently He wishes you to see Him, to contemplate Him, to believe in Him; He wishes you to receive Him in your hearts, and to reserve for Him in this inner sanctuary, the first, the most intimate and the most sacred place. He is not only the prophet of truth, He is the real truth; He is not only the proclaimer of light, He is the light. This is the true meaning of my text, and it is in interpreting it thus that one can comprehend its grandeur, its richness and its fruitfulness.

How has the manifestation of the person of Jesus Christ been the light of the world? To this question this is my reply: Because Jesus Christ has revealed to us what God is, and what man should be, because He has shown us then the relation which should unite man with God, because in solving this question, the first of all, He has shed light on all other questions which depend on it, He has explained magnificently our destiny.

I say first, that Christ has revealed to us what God is. It was not that He discoursed upon God; He has not given us a single philosoph-

ical or metaphysical definition of God. But He showed Him to us. He was fully conscious of their meaning when He pronounced these words: "He that hath seen me hath seen my Father." He felt then that He was in His humanity "the express image of God," as the Scripture says, (Heb. i. 3), or to use another expression of St. Paul, "the visible image of the invisible God," (Col. i. 15). And it is a fact that with Jesus Christ a new idea of God entered humanity. Moses had revealed the only God, the holy God, the God all powerful, the just God; Jesus Christ revealed the God full of mercy and tenderness, God as providence, God as love. Light was cast upon the divine character, the final and supreme light. What can one add to the idea of God as love?

At the same time in Jesus appeared a new ideal of humanity. I do not mean merely in the discourses, in the teaching of Christ. I mean in His person. Jesus never taught a systematic and scientific morality. He has simply replaced the moral world on its true axis which is the love of God and the love of men; but He has nowhere entered into a classification of our duties, in a thorough explanation of the motives,



the ends, the impulses and the sanctions of our moral activity. In the sermon on the mount, He has shown the interior and spiritual character of the law, He has shown what is true purity and true love; in His immortal parables He has taught us by some examples what are the conditions of the life eternal, but it is especially by the manifestation of His person and by the radiance of His life that He has revealed to us the moral ideal of humanity.

For the first time, in Him we find a life fulfilling absolutely the moral law, that is to say, wholly directed by the love of God and of man—a life in which there was not an act, not a word, not a thought, not a motive of the heart which did not harmonize with the glory of God and the good of mankind, which was not inspired, filled, penetrated, by the love of God and man. In Him we see for the first time the wonderful combination of all the virtues which seem opposed and ordinarily incompatible; authority and simplicity, majesty and humility, strength and gentleness; the horror of evil and tender compassion, purity without asceticism, and familiarity without vulgarity. Just as, to employ an image that my subject suggests, the diverse colors

decomposed by the prism, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, bright and dazzling as they may be, make, in reuniting, the white perfect in spotless splendor; so all the diverse features which compose the person of Christ unite and blend in an extraordinary harmony, so striking that it has forever impressed itself upon the conscience of humanity. In Him light has been cast forever on man. In Him we see man as He should be. ✧

This grand image is before us, and everywhere it lifts itself; the absolute return of night is impossible. Doubtless the powers of darkness may fall at times upon the race of man; degradation, deception, hypocrisy, violence can even use Christ's name, but malice and confusion will not last long; the light will triumph; treacherous shadows, hideous nightmares, will disappear, and in the gray dawn and glorious morning, righteousness, purity, and love will shine forth.

Thus Jesus has perfectly revealed to us what God is and what man should be; that is to say, my brethren, He has illuminated the deep abyss which separates man from God. The more evident and luminous has been His holiness, the more perceptible has it made our own imperfec-

tion; all our virtues become pale beside His perfections, as the false sparkle of trinkets grows dim in the presence of the fire of a pure diamond. It is not only our crimes of which His purity makes apparent the repulsive hideousness; it is those thoughts, those bad intentions, those hatreds and those evil desires, which no human law can reach, but which are made manifest by Him. He makes us to discern at the same time the evil we have done and the good that we have neglected to do; He casts an inexorable light on all false appearances, over all ostentation, the pursuit of human glory, self-love more or less skilfully disguised. Never before Him had our nature been so profoundly, so surely judged, never had man been thus revealed to man. Thus was fulfilled the prophetic words pronounced upon the child Jesus by the aged Simeon, "By Him the thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed" (Luke ii. 35). Thus the light which radiates from His person and which appears to us at first sublime, at length becomes exacting and terrible, since it penetrates to the lowest depths of our being and exposes our corruption.

This light would be insupportable and would

leave us without hope, if after having revealed our misery, it did not at the same time reveal the divine mercy, and if it did not show to us in God a love greater than our revolt, a pardon greater than our iniquity. Here, my brethren, is what above all Jesus crucified teaches us, and for this reason those grand words, "I am the light of the world," never seem grander and truer than when they fall from the cross. The sinner discovers and receives at the foot of the cross a grace truly worthy of God, because it conserves His justice, in revealing His mercy; he sees there sin at the same time judged and forgiven. Strange thing! God never appears to him holier than at the moment when He pardons him, and in seeing at what price his salvation is gained, he understands the sacred majesty of His rights better than when the law resounds in solemn and threatening tones from the heights of Sinai. And at the same time divine love penetrates him to depths until then unknown. That active and impassioned tenderness, that mercy of which the Scripture had already given us a sublime idea, and of which the parables of Jesus had made so touching and familiar a reality, have been truly rendered clear and striking only on

the cross. Thus whoever looks upon it with faith feels that God is there, and finds Him, in one transport which decides forever his life. So was it with the repentant malefactor whom it first saved. Here is, my brethren, a truth of experience, an actual fact whose reality we can daily verify.

The cross illumines these three dread mysteries called sin, sorrow, and death, upon which science has never been able to throw any light. Nothing has ever illumined them like the cross. It shows the greatness and the terrible consequences of sin by making us to understand at what price it had to be expiated; but in showing us the expiation of it really accomplished, it assures us the victory and forever destroys the fatality of evil. All other religions, all philosophies, must compromise with evil and extenuate it in order to make place for it; the religion of the cross alone dares to see it as it is, because it alone can crush it. It is the same with sorrow; the cross illumines it, in revealing to us in God a power of sympathy that man never had dared dream of. Henceforth there will be no suffering with which the cross dares not grapple, because there is none which it does not

reach and console. As far as we descend in this abyss, we will find there before us Jesus Christ, and wherever we can find His love, we find consolation.

Is there a philosophical theory of any kind, a doctrine of resignation founded on the nature of things or on the divine will which has ever brought to wounded hearts the peace which one look at the cross brings to them? Who can count the daily victories that the cross obtains in this city alone, in the century which thinks itself to have long since outgrown it. The cross calms the troubled conscience, it heals the bleeding wounds of the heart, it mitigates the terrors of agony. It is our supreme weapon in those terrible combats where all other weapons have been found ineffective and soon broken; it is the last object which we present to the failing vision, and we ourselves, when we feel the cold sweat of agony on our brow, we know that we will die tranquil if our soul can contemplate with confidence the cross which has saved us.

Thus the destiny of entire humanity is illumined by Him who calls Himself the light of the world. But that which is true of our race as a whole is applicable also to each of its

members; there is not one of our lives which cannot itself receive from him a consolatory light. Just as the visible sun, in illuminating the whole world shows off the brightness of the humblest flowers of the field or the sparkling plumage of the birds; just as it has rays which render more brilliant the attire of the young bride, which charm the gaze of little children, and send their joyous reflection into the cabin of the poor and the garret of the sick artisan; even so the gospel, in projecting a new and powerful light upon the collective history of our race, illumines the path of the smallest, the most ignorant and the humblest; so much so that each one of them will be sometimes tempted to believe that this Sun of grace rises for himself alone.

Wonderful and touching multiplication of the divine goodness, perpetual miracle, in which the sceptic sees only illusion, but where we must needs recognize adoringly the manifestation, active, universal, and perpetual, of Him of whom Christ has said that He worketh continually. Thus, upon lives the most common and degraded this light turns the royal splendors of its divine rays; joys, sorrows, toils, unrest, temptations, humiliations, secret wounds, heart-rendings, hid-

den griefs, all the acts, all the thoughts, all the impressions which form the woof of our existence, are illuminated and penetrated by it. And this light is not that of science, which often, like the glitter of the moon sparkling in a frosty night, illumines all without warming anything. Warmth, on the contrary, issues from it, gentle and vivifying, such as only the sympathy of a God can be; it penetrates the soul and floods it with a joy hitherto unknown. Under its creative and fruitful influence everything is born again in the transformed soul, even as everything upon earth blossoms again at the mild breath of spring.

To see this manifestation of divine grandeur, holiness and love which Christ brings to the world, and the numberless blessings which every day proceed from it, it would seem as if men ought to worship Him on bended knee; and certainly, if it were true that, as one philosophy proclaims, our nature has remained pure, if our spontaneous aspirations went forth toward that which is just and true, Jesus Christ would soon reign over humanity. But let us not indulge in vain words; let us remember how Jesus Christ has been received by mankind; let us remem-



ber the hatred which has followed Him everywhere; I do not speak of the blind hatred of a misguided crowd, I speak of that of men who knew whom they were hating and why they hated Him.

Let us remember that if the cross is the most luminous and sublime of signs, it rises up from the sinister foundation of the most odious passions that the world has ever seen. "The light shineth in darkness," said St. John, "and the darkness comprehended it not." Now the gospel is not a historic fact which happened once for all eighteen centuries ago; it is a drama which recommences and renews itself at each period, between those two beings whom God brings face to face,—the just and Holy Christ and sinning man. In all human generations, when holiness appears, it meets with the same resistance, the same antipathies, as it did on the day when it became incarnate in Christ. The world dreads this light because this light is exacting and implacable toward it, because it brings out all its corruption and falsity, because it passes sentence on it in showing what it is: "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the

light lest his deeds should be reproved" (Johr iii. 20).

Nevertheless, my brethren, sooner or later we must come to it. Before the Judge supreme nothing can remain unknown, before the holy God nothing can live which He condemns. One can fly from the light for a time. Some day we must be judged by it. Let us anticipate this judgment! Let it from this day penetrate our lives, let it expose all that our poor hearts contain of misery, selfishness, evil desire; let us recognize, let us confess, in humiliation and shame, all the sins which accuse and dishonor us. Let us see ourselves as we are, in spite of all that is cruel and bitter in such a sight.

O Jesus Christ, light of the world, divine revealer of the truth, substantial and living truth, show us what we are in order to save us forever from the illusion of pride which has destroyed us. Give sight to our blinded eyes, and after having made us to measure the depth of the abyss into which we have fallen, reveal to us each day more and more the splendors of Thy mercy and the joys of that eternal life where Thou wouldst bring all those whom Thou hast redeemed. Amen!

V.

The Unequal Gifts.



## V.

### The Unequal Gifts.

*“For the Kingdom of Heaven is as a man travelling in a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods.*

*“And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one: to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.”*

MATT. xxv. 14. 15.

WHAT are the talents which are spoken of in this parable. Must we take them in a general sense as the gifts which God distributes in unequal measure to every man, such as health, physical strength, material resources, fortune, education, the favoring influences which one finds in his surroundings? Or must we rather regard them as purely spiritual graces scattered lavishly or sparingly by the Sovereign Dispenser, from whom descends every good gift, and to whom all the glory should be rendered?

— I believe, my brethren, that both of these explanations are true, so that neither excludes the

other; I believe that this parable of Jesus, like nearly all of His parables, casts its light at the same time over the domain of nature and that of grace. It is in this sense, at once strict yet broad, that I wish to study it with you; and not to dwell upon all its lessons in detail, I will speak in this sermon of the unequal gifts which God bestows on us, and in subsequent ones of the service which He asks of us, and of the account we must all one day render to Him.

At the very threshold of this parable we meet with a word which touches upon the most painful, trying problem which our century has attempted to solve; that is, the origin of inequalities. Jesus attributes it without hesitancy to God. He compares God to a master who unequally distributes his goods. I know well enough all the resentments which this doctrine has awakened in our age. In the eyes of many justice and equality are synonymous, and consequently inequality is in their view the same as injustice. Well, since this question confronts us, let us, my brethren, approach it with entire sincerity.

Let us observe first what Jesus Christ does not say.

1. He does not say that the master loves least those to whom he gives the least.

2. He does not say, that the master acts from caprice; on the contrary He gives us to understand that it is of wise design; since each one of his servants receives "according to his several ability."

3. He does not say, that this inequality lasts beyond the time of trial, that is to say, beyond the present life. The two faithful servants who had received different portions, obtain the same recompense: "They enter into the joy of their Lord."

But, these reservations made, let us observe that Jesus Christ says plainly, that the master gave to one five talents, to another two, and to another one.

Notice now that what Jesus Christ affirms, nature affirms also. Absolute equality exists nowhere in nature, for absolute equality, if you look well at it, would be uniformity: and there is nothing less uniform than the works of God. You can gather thousands of leaves from the same oak, and in comparing them you will not find two that are identical, or which placed side by side correspond even in their principal

fibres. It is the works of man that repeat themselves so fatally: I mean not only the products of our manufactories, cast by millions in the same mould, or cut out by the same stroke of the die; I mean the very works of genius, those whose spontaneous inspiration makes us think of the divine. Raphael and Michael Angelo reproduce themselves, and the critic's discerning eye easily recognizes their respective styles. In nature, on the contrary, and in each of the kingdoms which compose it, you will find the most wonderful hierarchy,—and in each degree of this great system, life exerting itself in ever-varied forms. As you ascend in the scale, the diversity increases; at the bottom, as in crystallization, you will find the rigidity of geometry: at the top, with man, you will find the unexpected, which is the product of liberty.

I observe not only that this inequality is a fact, but that it is, moreover, a bond of union between men; that it obliges them to lean upon each other, inasmuch as it is an assertion of their mutual dependence. In a state of absolute equality each one would be sufficient for himself. God has not willed it so to be. He



has established among us all a necessary relationship; it is in others that I must find what is lacking in myself; it is upon me that a brother should lean who is less endowed than myself.

Nowhere does this mutual dependence appear more beautiful, more touching, than in the family life, when this is what it should be. Here we find marked inequality creating diverse relations between all its members; the man has rather the creative gift and the initiative; the woman excels in the receptive qualities; the vigor of youth and the strength of maturity unite in supporting the weakness of the aged and the inexperience of the child. Authority here finds expression, exercises itself in a thousand sweet and charming ways which are called influence, respect, wisdom, kindness, and love. Attempt now to bring this down to the degrading level of certain communistic utopias, and you will see what a protestation you will raise. Thus observe, at the foundation of the family and of all society there is inequality.

Would you agree with me, my brethren, if I stopped here and sustained on one side by the authority of my text, on the other by that of experience, I should just simply conclude that

all inequality, every form of inequality, is a fact which we must all accept? I am sure that you would not; I am sure that on the contrary you would accuse me of falsifying the Gospel by presenting it unfairly, as a partisan advocate and not as a disciple of Jesus Christ; and you would be a thousand times right.

There is indeed an equality which is just, which is legitimate, and to which we aspire in virtue of our better nature. It is equality in our eternal destiny; and you know how clearly the Gospel states it. Rich or poor, learned or ignorant, great or small in earthly relations, we have been redeemed by the same blood, and we are called to the same heavenly heritage. In this sense, before God there is no respect of persons; there will not be any in the last judgment, there cannot be any here below.

Let us beware however! One can exaggerate this idea, and draw it out to a revolting conclusion. One might say: "Yes, we consent to this, the equality in Heaven, upon condition that you assure us here below the peaceful enjoyment of our privileges." One might from a wholly gross and worldly motive become the defender of religion and of the Church, especially because as a

well-known cynical saying expresses it,—“The Church is the best keeper of the strong-box.”<sup>n</sup>

My brethren, I do not care to inquire how many of our fellow beings, sceptical at heart, uphold religion for this end only. I will only say that their estimate is false, for they impose on no one; everybody sees through that intention, and, much as they wish it, they exercise no serious influence; people can respect a religion which is a sincere belief, but they scorn and detest a religion which they can make a tool of; and they are right.

But I protest against those who would attribute to the Gospel the abuses which they draw from it. One might extract a fatal poison from the air we breathe and which gives us life; do not be astonished that any one finds in the Gospel a justification for his selfishness, a sedative to ease the conscience. What I maintain is, that the true logic of the Gospel leads in another direction, which I will point out to you.

I have said that we are all equal in our eternal destiny, all the objects of the same love, all redeemed by the same blood, all called to the same salvation. But what are we to understand by this unless that every man should have an

equal right to save his soul by doing that which the Gospel bids him do to this end? Well, I ask you, is this possible for all of us to-day? Is this possible, I do not say for the heathen who groan in the gloom of their darkness, but for the thousands of beings yet held in bondage by their ignorance and misery? Can purity of soul and body be preserved in certain conditions? Is there not a measure of misery and ignorance which distorts the conscience, as drunkenness distorts the brain? Are there not some dark and slippery declivities where the firmest step will make a fatal slide? Are there not material conditions of living and of working, masses of human beings, where the miasmas and corruption float and ferment in the air more rapidly even than the fetid odors one breathes there? To sum it all up, you Christian mothers who listen to me, would you like your children tenderly brought up, to be exposed for a day, or an hour, to the sights, to the language, to the streams of immorality in the midst of which thousands of children like your own are reared and who like your own were capable of understanding all that is pure, great, and holy?

Therefore I say, as long as such facts exist, as

long as such inequality manifests itself in such a cruel way, opening before us such frightful perspectives, we cannot, we ought not to take sides with it. We must suffer from it; the Gospel must reproach us with it, and weary us with it; this religion which we would fain make a pillow of idleness, must be changed to a pricking needle. Holding our conscience unceasingly on the watch, we must in the midst of our luxuries, of our frivolity, of our elegant pleasure,—in our daily life, honest perhaps, but deplorably and miserably selfish,—we must listen to the words of the Master, “I was an hungered and ye gave me no meat. I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink. I was sick and ye did not visit me. Depart from me ye cursed !”

Thus the belief in equality in our eternal destinies should lead us to combat with energy all that which in the inequalities of the present life might prejudice the moral life of our fellow beings, all the excesses of misery and suffering which place their souls in evident peril. He does not deserve the name of Christian who consents to leave his brother in a state of moral servitude and abasement of which the inevitable consequence must be his degradation.

This reservation made, and you see that it is necessary, we will not return to it again, except as we face it in our text—"To one five talents, to another two, to another one." Inequality in the present time remains a fact, and a fact determined by God.

Before this fact what must we do? Accept it, so far as it does not wound the conscience; accept it in seeking to alleviate it, and to soften its asperities; but accept it finally, humbly, bravely, and without murmuring. You are poor, you are a workingman, you toil; you are not among those called the privileged ones of this world; you have only your two talents, only one talent. What difference does it make? Are you less beloved by God for this? Are you less a man, a child of God, an immortal soul? Is your life depreciated and degraded by it? Do not let yourself say this; let it not lower your dignity as a man and Christian; look at your life in its true grandeur, in the light of eternity. Say to yourself that if you do toil, Jesus the Son of God, the King of souls, has toiled and has suffered; say that His hands, before He raised them to bless humanity, were hardened by the touch of the tools of labor; say that our true

nobility, our real dignity, we owe to those children of the people who were called Peter, Andrew, Philip, and James; and that since Christ saved humanity by suffering for it and by toiling for it, there is no solid greatness, no lasting glory, but that which is gained by service and self-sacrifice.

Moreover, one thought here should stop the murmuring on your lips, and that is, the wisdom of the Almighty.

God knows no fickleness; He abides faithful to His nature; He is and will ever remain just and good. St. James says, "There is in Him no shadow of turning." Now what rule does He follow in the distribution of His gifts? "To each one according to his ability." God did not cast us all in the same mould. He made us different, and that is well, but it must follow that our abilities differ also. And by this word "abilities" you must not only understand the intellectual capacities. There is evidently some other meaning here which includes especially the moral abilities, our fitness to bear such and such a burden. It is just here that we are inclined to practice on ourselves prodigious delusions. We can have an exact enough idea of

our intellectual faculties, to recoil from a task which is evidently beyond them, or to judge without presumption that we might be placed higher than we are; but what we but imperfectly know, what we do not sufficiently ask of ourselves, is whether we are morally strong enough to meet success, fortune, greatness. Just here is a fact which strikes me. The men who criticise most severely those who are above them are most assuredly the least capable of replacing them. The poor, full of envy, should they become rich, would be full of pride; the ambitious embittered, would be *parvenus* full of harshness; those who waver under the temptations of a moderate position would have been blinded by the prestige of a higher position.

Do you believe, my brethren, that you are in the hands of that stupid idol called chance? Or do you believe in a divine intervention in your destiny? If you believe that God is great enough to think of you who are small, if you believe that He despises none of His creatures, and that your salvation is not indifferent to Him who sent His Son here below to redeem you, you will believe at the same time that in His wisdom He has assigned to you the place you should have, because



He knows better than you your abilities, and what will crush them.

You will doubtless say to me that I preach here a resignation wholly passive, that I fix each immovably in his position, that I imprison him in a circle traced by the divine hand, and that this will tend to stifle all progress, all ambition, and to lead us back to the government of castes. I beg that you will not misconstrue my thought. I do not intend by any means to preach here a fatalistic resignation. I believe that Christianity which proposes to us nothing less than perfection, and which proposes this to all, tends to stimulate all our faculties and incite us with energy on to progress. For this idea of progress has entered into humanity with the purely Christian idea of the kingdom of God. Nothing is more natural than that one should desire to go forward in an age and society where all careers are open to all. But, at the same time, I believe that in order to advance, one must have the necessary capacities, such as are self-evident: I believe that when God gives them to a man He makes him see so clearly that it is impossible to doubt. If you have received such capacities show it. This is, need I say it, the

rare exception. If you have them not, bless God that He has placed you in a position where giddiness cannot attack you; accept resolutely your place, and murmur not because you have received but two talents.

Do you know anything in history sadder than the reign of a fool, or of a child incapable of ruling, yet possessing absolute power? "Woe to thee, O land!" say the Scriptures, "when thy king is a child" (Eccl. x. 16). When I see in the Louvre, portraits of the *infantas* of Spain of the seventeenth century, such as the brush of Rubens or Velasquez has preserved for us, in reading upon the pale countenances of these poor weaklings, their profound and helpless incapacity, I foresee the downfall of a country they are called upon to govern, and I tremble when I think that these imbeciles may be taken from their puerile pleasures, or from their miserable devotions, in order to put their signature to the warrant for a heretic's death or to attend some *auto-da-fé*. But what we see here in a grand sphere, occurs every day on a narrower stage, in those families where a large inheritance falls into the hands of a prodigal or a fool. Nothing is so sad as to receive more than one can

bear. How many consciences have staggered under the responsibilities too heavy, how many hearts, which seemed valiant and pure, have been unable to bear the temptations of too great prosperity?

God alone knows the foolish dreams all of us here present have indulged in, dreams of pride, of vanity, of fortune, of happy love, alas! perhaps of guilty passions, of detestable and shameful pleasures. Ah! if all of our past ambitions could speak, what sad confessions we would hear! I confine myself to one question. If you had been gratified, if you had received, I do not say five talents, but the hundred, the thousand you have dreamed of, would you be here? Would you be bowed for a single moment before God under the sense of your misery? Would you with a fervent heart be praising Him for His mercies? Would you be caring for eternity? Would you be following the narrow way? Without affliction, without disappointed dreams, without delusions, without sorrows, without poverty, would you go to Him who has said, "Come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden"? To sum it all up in a word, would you be Christians, would you be saved?

The talents were distributed. What says the Gospel next? "The master straightway took his journey." This is not the only time that Jesus employs similar expressions to indicate the attitude that God takes towards humanity in this short period of the divine existence that we call the history of the world. What does this mean? Is God absent? Can God separate Himself from His work? Would Jesus teach this? Could His God be the God of Descartes, of whom Pascal said, "Descartes only needed Him to give the first impetus to a world which is afterwards left to its natural laws"? Beware of thinking so. No one more than Jesus Christ has spoken of the close and constant relation of God with the world. Do you remember His sublime and familiar teachings of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, of whom God takes care and whom He clothes more magnificently than Solomon in all his glory?

If Jesus here compares God to a master who is absent, it is because God seems really to be so. He does not commune with us directly. Between Him and us there are what we call the laws of nature; that is, as well as we can represent it, His ideas realized in time and

space. Well, these laws have a double effect. Suppose a truly religious soul which has come into direct communication with God by faith, and by that exercise of faith which is called prayer; these laws transport that soul by their sublimity, their harmony; moreover that soul knows that back of those laws there is the loving heart of a living, ever-present God. Suppose, on the contrary, a soul indifferent and without faith; these laws produce upon it a different effect; it sees only in them the character of fate, necessary, inexorably periodic; the world seems to it more and more like an immense chain of causes and effects, like an endless mill-gearing, like the working out of an eternal fatality.

My brethren, here is the great test of faith. God hides His face, God remains silent. The moral law is violated, but He speaks not; men blaspheme and insult Him, He speaks not; the wicked triumph, yet He speaks not. Then the scoffers become bold, and the ancient challenge which the sceptics flaunted before the prophesying is repeated—"What is thy God doing?"

I repeat it, this is the great test of faith, but this test has been foretold us; we must expect it. We must see the hidden God, we must

hear the silent God, we must always confess His justice, His mercy, and His love, in spite of all the wrongs which defame Him. We must serve Him and await Him, as if He might appear to-day. "Blessed," says the Scripture, "is that servant whom his Lord when He cometh shall find watching." Amen.

VI.

Lazarus at the Rich Man's Door.





## VI.

### Lazarus at the Rich Man's Door.<sup>1</sup>

*"There was a certain rich man which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.*

*"And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores."*

LUKE xvi. 19, 20.

ARE you not impressed, my brethren, with the striking contrast which these simple words present? It is now eighteen centuries since they were spoken. Have they lost anything of their reality? Wealth, misery! always before us, to-day, as then; and in such sense before us that

<sup>1</sup> In this sermon, altogether special, delivered before an audience assembled to form a collection for the poor, one must not look for what I neither could nor wanted to discuss here. In other circles, where luxury has not attained the proportions which so menace us, but where selfishness seeks elsewhere its satisfaction and its pleasure there would be something else to say. Incomplete as this discourse may be, I have decided to write and publish it in view of the requests that have been made for it.

their conflict is of all social questions, the chief, the most difficult, the darkest, the fullest of menace for the future. But for this terrible problem, solutions have not been wanting.

"No more rich!" some have said, and we have heard the crowd repeating this mad cry—"No more rich! Let us strike down opulence, let us attack capital, let us do away with the right of inheritance!" and they did not see that in thus saying, they struck a death blow at liberty, and with liberty energy, and with energy labor itself, to leave us only the equality of savages, who, with nothing laid up for the morrow, fall asleep, indifferent, until hunger forces them to seek their prey.

"No more poor!" others have cried, and in this age a loud echo has responded to them: "No more poor!" Ah! if there had been in this but a wish, an outburst of charity! But they made it a motto, and a promise. No more poor! and some said, "The state ought to assure work to all"; others, "The state will feed the poor"; and they did not see that they are imposing upon the state an impossible task, that they would thus create the most artificial and tyrannical utopia; they did not see in short that they

ignore human nature. For, to decree that there shall be no more misery, would amount to decreeing there shall be no more indolence, no more vices, no more passions, no more sin.

But, while these theories succeed in misleading the multitude into cruel, deceptive dreams, which must leave them without consolation and without bread, the evil continues its slow and fatal march.

No more rich, no more poor! Go to-day to England, that classic ground of philanthropy and social economy; there you will see, by the side of the most colossal wealth gathered from all parts of the world, a nameless misery, which, after having exposed its savage degradation to the sun each day, takes refuge at night in dens, of which a benevolent man, who visited them, said recently in a famous article, that only Sodom could shelter such infamies.

See where we are—in the year 1866. The rich and the poor face to face, as in the words of my text, and, if the abundance and the resources of the former have increased by the progress of a civilization of eighteen centuries, the misery of the latter is as real, as consuming as ever.

To this evil, what social remedy must be applied? This is not my subject, my brethren; such a question is foreign to my task. I am not here to examine systems, I take humanity as I find it. I see before me the rich, and the poor; I believe these will continue to be to-morrow, as they were yesterday; and in the name of the Gospel, I come once more to recall to the former their duties toward the latter. The subject is not new I admit, no newer than suffering. I shall repeat probably what you have heard a hundred times. What of that? The day when our selfishness shall die, I promise you, my brethren, to cease speaking of charity, of sacrifice.

Behold Lazarus laid at the rich man's gate! Now! what I ask first is, that the rich man fix his eyes on Lazarus. I mean here by the rich, all those before whom some Lazarus is lying, all those who have it in their power to aid and comfort him.

Look at Lazarus! But understand me fully. It is not a question of being moved to pity incidentally, at the story of some unfortunate, of throwing him a few alms, of acting a certain *rôle* in some work of charity, and after having thus eased the conscience, of complacently say-

ing, "What a philanthropic, generous age this is!" It is a question of meeting suffering face to face, and of becoming acquainted with it. This is what I call looking at Lazarus. Is it done? Do you believe that it should be done? Ours is the age of systems of benevolence, of associations, of institutions. There is great progress! you will say. Yes, but fatal progress, if it is to prevent that direct contact of the rich and the poor, of the happy and the wretched, which the Gospel enjoins on every page, and whose healthful action no institution can supersede.

I know what you will reply—"Time is wanting!" And I am not of those who condemn this excuse. To-day, in all vocations, life is more and more like a forced march; each seeking to arrive first at the end. Every career is encumbered, the new-comers press on impatiently, and want to find their place. It is a struggle, a mob, through which one must push ahead for fear of being quickly supplanted. Never perhaps since man has worked was work more severe, more crushing. People do not walk, they run. Woe to him who stops to breathe too long! But is it always duty which compresses

life to this point? I ask it of those to whom God has given a little of ease and fortune. Is it true that you have absolutely no leisure, no rightful leisure? Now in a society where, I do not say the Christian spirit, but simply justice predominates, do you believe that the leisure of those who have means does not providentially belong to those who bear the burden of daily toil? In this leisure, what part are you acting towards Lazarus, what portion of your time do you give to poverty and sorrow? Ah! leisure thus consecrated is a noble mission, it is a grand beneficence both for the unfortunate and for yourselves! We are going then to see you at the work; and we, the insignificant of the earth, weighed down by work and tied to our post by care for our daily bread, we are going to lean upon you to whom God has given a portion privileged among all. Alas! this were to leave out of account the ambition, the selfishness, the worldliness, which would usurp that leisure and absorb it all.

I take an example, and I take it from a class which is in constant contact with the sufferings of the people, and cannot justify itself by the plea of ignorance.

Here is a large manufacturer, whose fortune amounts to opulence; in his workshops, in his warehouses, the workmen number thousands; all those arms, all those wills, all those energies belong to him, and from morning till night obey him. He has known how to train those productive powers, and by practice and skill to make them do all they are capable of. But in those workshops there is suffering; the air is unhealthy, faces become pale and pinched, men and women work promiscuously; the moral atmosphere is charged with filth and corruption; the apprentice, to whom the law gives rest on Sunday, is cheated out of it, as is the case in the majority of our large factories in Paris; and there, bent over his machines, stupefied by work premature and unrelaxed, deprived more and more of a religious and moral life, he languishes, affected with degeneration of the blood, and rickety in body and mind.

But that man upon whom rests so grave a responsibility, that man, the soul and the head of that industry, why does he pass coldly by those sufferings which he might relieve by giving to them for a moment that steady look and that resolute action which he gives to ev-

everything he undertakes? My brethren, he has not time. . . . to look at Lazarus! What, he! And do you not see what absorbs him, what is furrowing wrinkles in his brow, what is filling his heart and his thoughts? There before him are those rivals whom he must outstrip, those fortunes whose colossal figures seem to insult his own, those riches, those splendors which float before his imagination! This end! he must attain it, he must press on, press on still, run, without losing a moment.

But has not that man a wife, Christian daughters, capable of feeling, and of thinking of those thousands of beings whose existence and happiness are so closely bound to him? They have pious and susceptible hearts, they have wept a hundred times over touching stories of imaginary ills, they have groaned like yourselves over the fate of the people, over those poor children corrupted at an early age and deprived of all that our own enjoy in abundance. They are surely going to act, they are going to visit these families, to look close at these miseries, to offer to those women, to those young girls a helping hand. . . . Ah! you have left worldliness out of the account. To look at Lazarus! What, they! But their



heart is elsewhere. Between the pleasures of yesterday and those of to-morrow, between the recollections of the last season and the toilettes of the new season, midst all those ambitions, all those rivalries, all that selfishness, how can you expect them to find time to think of what is passing down there in the *faubourg*, within those sad bare walls, amid that indigent, irreligious, miserable population? The *faubourg*, they will cross it some day, proudly attired, resplendent, conveyed by rapid horses; it is in this way that the people will learn to know them—and on the following Sunday, seated like you, my sisters, in church, they will condemn like you this rich man of the parable who left Lazarus to suffer, abandoned, at the gate of his palace!

Let us go further, and let us say what every one knows, and every one thinks. The reason why many to-day do not want to look at Lazarus, is that they are not strangers to his suffering, and that their conscience will find in it a sting.

The Gospel speaks to us of unrighteous riches. What name must be given to numerous forms of it which spring up to-day? A man undertakes

a transaction which he knows is either wholly bad, or liable at least to enormous chances of failure. What difference does it make! He undertakes it; once undertaken it must be made to succeed: the means well understood offer themselves; without putting his own hand to them, he lets them act; soon a grand announcement fills the newspapers; the most pressing solicitations, the most brilliant promises held up before the eyes of the ignorant, all the seductions of easy, rapid and sure gain. They come forward, alas! the poor fools, to give to the tempting speculation, one, the savings of a lifetime slowly acquired by the sweat of his brow, another, the portion and the bread of his children. And why should they not do so? Who warns them, who informs them? So they come forward, and, made up of all these spoils snatched from honest labor, the capital increases, increases constantly, until all of a sudden it crumbles, it melts away. . . . Go, now, poor father of a family; go, poor working man, who, during thirty or forty years have faithfully done your duty; go, poor working-woman, who, denying yourself necessities, have saved up carefully the bread of your old age: go, look for the fruits of your labor; go, reclaim it

from the stones of those sumptuous mansions which rise up like magic, from all those splendors which dazzle your gaze, from all those riches, upon which Christ would have poured His anathema!

Is this a romance I am reciting? Is it not the real and heart-rending history of thousands of unfortunates? And you who hear me, are you sure before God who sees you, that you are strangers, absolutely strangers to such iniquities? Have you contributed to them neither directly nor indirectly? Have you discouraged them, and frowned upon them by your firm stand and your example? Who will do it, if not Christians? Who will awaken the conscience of our times, so careless, so tolerant of the evil which is crowned with success? Who will call to mind that God reigns, that He reckons the sufferings of the poor, that He listens to the groans of the wronged, and that the fate of the wicked rich man of the parable is a hundred times preferable to that of the men who have themselves laid Lazarus upon his bed of want and degradation?

Thus, your first duty, my brethren, is to look at Lazarus, to see his sufferings face to face.

This is not all. You must do yet more. You must come near to him, he must feel your presence, he must hear your voice. I have said it before; charity at a distance does not suffice; besides it is this sort of charity which deceives, which encourages intriguing vice adroitly covered with the rags of poverty. Nothing replaces the direct and personal sight of those who suffer. So the Gospel on every page exhorts us to see the poor, to comfort them directly. And what exhortation can equal the admirable example which Jesus Christ has left us?

Have you not remarked this fact, brief and striking, which accompanies almost all the cures, all the works of mercy of our Saviour? "Jesus, drawing nigh, *touched* the sick, or the leper, and said to him, 'Be ye healed, depart in peace.'" He *touched* him, and this recalls to me an argument which the adversaries of Christianity have often adduced:—"Why does Jesus," say they, "since, according to the Scriptures, He can heal from a distance, why does He *touch* the sick with His hands? What object does He have, if not to act upon the imagination of the people? Is not this a common characteristic of all impostors?" Singular objection from a science

which understands everything except the inspiration of charity! Jesus can heal at a distance, but He will not do it; it pleases Him to touch with His divine hand those lepers, those unclean, those possessed with devils, whom every one shunned with disgust; and it is just here that we recognize the miracle of miracles, that of a charity that the world does not suspect. Admirable example which we must follow, my brethren, if we would follow Jesus Christ.

I do not hesitate to say that sympathy thus understood, is half the relief of those who suffer. You must have been struck with one result which always follows great poverty, and great suffering. The unfortunate, in proportion as he falls, thinks he sees all society turn against him; it seems to him that society excludes him, banishes him in some sort, treats him as a *pariah*. There is as it were a wall rising between him and the rest of mankind. Hence those bitter accusations which escape him against the world, against society, against the church, as if the world, society, the church, did not contain beings who are suffering like himself and who themselves also are undergoing the same hallucination from grief.

Well, suppose that in this bitterness the wretch-

ed man sees sitting at his bedside one of the favored ones, one of that privileged class whom fate has spared; suppose that he feels your hand press his own, and that he hears words of sympathy fall from your lips; do you not believe that his bad dream will speedily vanish? This is not all. He will learn perhaps in listening to you, that grief can dwell too in the hearts of those who seem to him happy; he will see by your habiliments of mourning that fortune does not save from cruel trials, and perhaps in this wounded heart compassion will spring up toward you, at the thought that you also have wept.

Do you remember what happened in England some years ago? A frightful explosion swallowed up two hundred miners; there, on the brink of the open chasm, their widows and mothers stood wailing, looking for their dead, and asking in anguish whence would come to them their morrow's bread? The bread came, it was made sure to them for the future, and she who sent it had added these words: "From a widow." A widow! It was the queen, but that day she was only a widow to weep with those who wept. The queen! What, there on that throne, in those palaces, in the midst of those riches, of those

splendors, there is a widow who weeps with us, who weeps as we do ! I venture to say that it is not to the children of those poor women that one could preach hatred or contempt for the rich ; and no one knows how many bitter feelings and revolts, this cry, this simple cry from the heart, has checked and rendered forever impossible.

It is needful, then, that those who suffer should learn to know you. It is needful for their sakes and because God orders it, and for your own good. You will never know what life ought to be, so long as you do not look misery full in the face. There are some things only to be learned which notwithstanding one needs to know. You, for example, who rejoice over the birth of a little child, when you shall have seen under another roof than your own, a child who comes into this world only to be an object of sadness and painful anxiety, and yet who, joyous and trusting, holds out his little arms to this great world, only to be repulsed by it ; you who mourn the death of father or mother, when you have seen an affliction like this of your own, consoled with a cruel, cynical word, which only sees in the event, riddance from a burden which was too

heavy; you will learn what the world is, and you will ask yourself whether you are permitted to live here in thoughtlessness and pleasure, and you will know what it is to sigh for the reign of justice, and of love.

This is the lesson misery should teach us. Is it understood? Alas! when I see to-day by so frightful a converse, the so-called higher classes turning their eyes, not towards honest suffering, but towards vulgar corruption, borrowing from it their fashions, their wiles, and even their language or, shall I say it, their slang; I ask myself what effect this amazing spectacle must have upon the toiling suffering classes, and to what nameless degradation it is leading them? But of what use is our indignation, if to the spread of corruption we do not oppose that of charity? We must act, we must descend into these depths, we must learn to look the evil in the face and close at hand.

I know that this contact is painful; there are sights which offend our delicacy; extreme poverty wounds our feelings; it takes a little courage to confront it. A dirty, winding staircase, a narrow room where the air is close and often fetid, and there is that indescribable odor with



which poverty impregnates all that it touches: children in rags, a truckle-bed where groans a sick one, and on the table victuals the very sight of which is repugnant,—all this is hard to bear: and then, admit it, this disturbs and saddens us by preaching to us with a piercing voice the necessity of sacrifice. How can we gratify our whims in the face of creatures who have not even the necessities of life. How think of a handsome toilette in face of a wretch who has not even the luxury of a little linen? How give one's self up to the joy of a feast, when one thinks of the miserable scraps which are to satisfy the hunger of a whole family?

You are pained then by such a spectacle and in advance you would escape it. But who are you to refuse to suffer? Is God's service always an easy thing? Is it by a winding and sweetly shaded path that one enters Heaven? Christians whom God has spared the persecutions and bloody sacrifices He demanded of your fathers, do you find your portion so grievous that you would remove from it even the renunciations which charity involves? You follow Jesus Christ, but what then is your Saviour? In this vague and gentle figure which conducts you only

over the ideal summits of a poetic reverie, I recognize well the Christ which our age has formed after its own image; but it is no longer the Man of sorrows, it is no longer the Christ of the publicans and the poor, it is no longer He who visited sorrow and vice as low down as He found them.

You suffer at the contact with misery? Ah! what is your suffering, I ask, in comparison with that of those who must live and die in the atmosphere which you cannot breathe an instant without disgust? If the bare sight of poverty frightens you, what is the condition of those who cannot escape from it a moment? You suffer, but to efface your painful impressions, you have your parks, your beautiful groves in summer; your apartments and your firesides with their cheerful blaze in winter. As for them, they have nothing but their four walls, dark and bare, their attics either burning hot, or freezing cold, their hearth without fire, the sight of other wretchedness equally repulsive groaning beside them; and besides on their spirit the incessant and cruel anxiety of gaining each day a livelihood, without which, at the first approach of sickness this last shelter will fail them.

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The sight of their poverty disgusts you; your luxury and your increasing prosperity hold you so entangled in their meshes that you cannot obey God's call when He sends you to the wretched. But how will you dare appear before God and render to Him an account of your task? What will you have to answer if God reject you in turn? Would you be astonished that your selfishness, your cowardice, your indolence should displease the Supreme Love? Think you that you offer to Him a more attractive sight than the misery of the poor presents to yourself? Think you that beneath the most amiable exterior, a heart without charity is not to the eyes of the Sovereign Judge an object of just abhorrence? Do you believe you can justify yourself by pleading your natural delicacy, and your instinctive repugnances? Answer, or rather obey that secret voice which troubles you, importunes you, and cries to you that there is no salvation without suffering, no eternal happiness without sacrifice.

Have I said all, my brethren, and does it suffice for the gaining of my cause that I have had you face to face with suffering? Yes, if the heart were right, if it obeyed the instructive

logic of devotion and of charity. But it is not so, and even in presence of sorrow, it argues, it bargains, it disputes with love every inch of ground. You acknowledge that the task is great, that it rests upon you, but who knows if at the first call of charity, you will not seal your lips by these simple words, "I cannot." I cannot! I would like to believe that you would not make this answer with levity; and it is not with levity that I would take it up. No, I do not judge you; if before God, you "cannot," that suffices me. I know there is a limit to all things, I know that liberty should be respected, and I will respect it. And what would become of us, I pray you, without that mutual respect which the Gospel enjoins? What would become of us if the spirit of judgment, under pretext of charity, should take free course and assess the devotion of each person?

I will respect your answer, but may I entreat you to inquire before making it, whether it be sincere and serious? You cannot! And why can you not? Is it not because the world has usurped all, even the poor's portion? Is it not that you too have yielded to this tide of luxury which presently nothing will be able

to stay? Ah! my brethren, it is to the world you must say, "I cannot." You must say it firmly, courageously, when it demands those useless expenditures, those extravagances in dress or furniture, those delicate refinements which your vanity so readily has yielded to it. What would you lose by such an answer? A triumph of self-love, which, in exciting the envy of others, would only have contracted your own heart. Suppose even that you should be condemned, accused of rigidity, could you not accept that? Shall there then be no longer anything to distinguish a Christian home from a worldly one, and must one make up his mind to see those who profess religion following with docility the bent of a world whose approbation is a snare, and its applause a danger?

But, for not having dared say it to the world, see yourselves forced to say it to your Saviour. It is to your Saviour that you reply, "I cannot"; to your Saviour whose kingdom advances but slowly, and whose poor members are neglected. It is for your Saviour that you reserve the courage of a refusal. Ah! Him you do not fear to grieve. His approbation, His blame, what is it all to you?

True, He redeemed you with the price of an unspeakable suffering; true, He comes to you with His crown of thorns, with His pierced feet and hands; true, in your last hour, when the world will have nothing more to say to you, you will call on Him that you may cross the dark valley and appear with Him before the eternal tribunal. Never mind ! to-day, after having taken the world's part, you coldly say to Him, "There is nothing left me for Thee !"

I do not wish to close, my brethren, without exposing a fallacy, under which it is the fashion now to screen luxury and worldliness. They say to us, "Rather than give to the poor, let us spend and enjoy. Your luxury gives the work of the people, and your expenditures are their profit. The more you envelop yourself in magnificent fabrics, the more your table is laden with delicacies, the more your house is decorated, the more hands will be employed; and the more families saved from poverty." Charming remedy, admirable process which one does not always dare avow, but with which one often eases his conscience when it is a question of yielding to his tastes and satisfying his fancies.

Well then! is this excuse true, is it well-founded? This remains for me to examine.

When it is wished to test the truth of a principle, there is nothing, my brethren, like pushing it to the end. You say that luxury is the salvation of poverty. Well, if you are right, spend, keep on spending, indulge in senseless fancies, invent new pleasures and endless luxuries. Apostles of a new charity, to the work, to the work of redeeming humanity! Ah! what a convenient religion, and which responds to the secret instincts of our nature! How well it will be received everywhere! Away with that gloomy piety which preaches sacrifice and self-denial! Luxury, ever luxury, and always more, —and when we shall swim in an opulence with which Rome and Babylon had nothing to compare, the people saved by you will never know suffering, and paradise will commence on earth.

You smile, my brethren, and yet take care. If the principle which is proposed to us is true, here is the direct and legitimate conclusion which we must draw from it; but, if this conclusion is absurd and cruel, must we not conclude the absurdity of the principle? Good sense together with experience, has it not long

taught that the extravagances of luxury are absolutely unproductive, that the more the living forces are devoted to the creation of the superfluous, the less of them will there be left for the production of the necessary? When you have drawn away from our fields a hundred thousand workmen, to throw them into your carpenter shops to build your palaces, or into the factories where your magnificent fabrics are made, is it not certain that for an unproductive luxury you have greatly diminished the product of your country's soil? When you have transformed the lumps of gold into jewelry and delicate ornaments, is it not certain that you have not increased by one grain the capital which supports humanity? Then your principle is false; false and cruel, for it will have famine for its ultimate consequence. One will see something of it on the first occasion of a social disturbance.

When under the menace of an unexpected crisis, all these fictitious values fall in the twinkling of an eye,—what will become of those thousands of men taken by your luxury from the vigorous, healthful work of the fields? Thrown into the streets of your great cities, accustomed to an easy gain and an easy expenditure too,



they will only be a peril to you; so much the more formidable from having witnessed your mad luxury, envy and hatred will fill their hearts at the sight of their own poverty.

That is not all. Not only is this principle cruel, but it is immoral. Immoral for you, for luxury after all is pleasure; and unrestrained pleasure, though refined as you idly call it, is the degradation of the soul and the will; it is the gratification of selfishness, and consequently the hardening of the heart. Immoral for others, to whom your example is a lesson. At your side the working man, a witness of your life, will also say to himself, "Why do I not enjoy myself? Why impose on me the severe and cruel law of renunciation?" And he will enjoy, and he will waste his daily pittance upon his coarse pleasures. Instead of your refined pleasures he will have the vulgar pleasures of the cellar and the tavern. I defy you to prevent this result.

Suppose it goes further. Soon the dregs of a disturbed society will be thrown up, and like the sound of a tempest, the voice of a vast people will say to you, "To enjoy, that is the right of all! You Christians point me to Paradise in the sky, but you lie, for I have seen you, your-

selves, look for it only on earth. I have seen you, religious men, enjoy here below all the pleasures, all the luxuries that my work can furnish you. Very well! my paradise, I want it also on the earth. I want it to-morrow, to-day. Long enough have you shown me a heaven beyond the tomb, but science has taught me, and it is not for an unknowable nothing that I want to spend my sweat and my tears. I am weary of waiting, I must have happiness. I must have it in this life where I have known nothing but deprivations. My happiness too is luxury, is wealth, is pleasure; all the fruits of the earth were given to me, as well as to you. My happiness, it is there before me; to take it I have but to will it. Woe to him who would stop me! Woe to him who puts himself in my way! To enjoy is the dearest word of life; I want to enjoy, I will enjoy, because I call myself legion; on my stout arms I carry the whole of society. With one blow from my shoulder, on the day chosen, I will overturn it!"

This is what will be said, my brethren, if it is true that the pleasures of some redeem the misery of others. From this terrible logic you cannot escape. May God spare our country from such a frightful demonstration!

But surely it is not upon such arguments that I would ever depend for moving you. If fear alone must urge you on to good, I would rather descend from this pulpit where the Gospel has sought to make us hear another language, more elevated, more worthy of God and of yourselves. To assuage misery, I will offer to you, to-morrow as to-day, but the one remedy,—that is, the spirit of Christ, that spirit which is at once justice and charity. To work, my brethren, in this spirit! To work, to-day, to-morrow, always, as long as there shall be on earth a misery to relieve, a suffering to console! Amen.



VII.

The Slave Onesimus.



## VII.

### The Slave Onesimus.

EPISTLE OF ST. PAUL TO PHILEMON.

It is a sad study for historians to penetrate the inner life of great men. There are few lives which can bear a close inspection. A writer, for example, has received from God the most wonderful gifts; his imagination thrills at all great and noble ideas, and what his beating heart has grasped, his lips or his pen translate into language which penetrates you and wrings from you a cry of enthusiasm. The man has just died, and in a private journal, or some forgotten page, you come upon his thoughts and his secret studies. Ah! do not read them if you would preserve your illusion intact. Yes, that great soul of an artist, vanity was consuming it, and while its inspirations were transporting you to the sky, it was the prey to incredible jealousies,

to mean struggles, to petty schemes which astound you. This savant, this cold quiet spirit, whose thoughts free, it might seem, from vulgar interests, dwelt in the serene regions of the laws of nature, was pursuing in reality here on earth, his plans of selfish ambition and his rivalries of school and of party. History is full of these sad contrasts, and he who knows it intimately must take pains with himself to maintain his respect for humanity.

I read, for example, the funeral orations of Bossuet, and that last discourse in which he announces that, warned by his gray hairs of the account which he must render, he desires to reserve "for the flock which he must feed with the word of life, the remains of a voice which is failing, and of an ardor which is dying out." I am moved by this noble old age, and by this grand voice which with such authority contrasts the eternal realities with the splendors of the century which is about to close. Then I open the journal where are faithfully recorded the minutest details of the close of his life, and I see Bossuet exhausted by sickness, multiplying his efforts and his measures for the promotion to the episcopacy of his nephew, one of



the lowest characters of those times,—skilfully managing the Jesuits for whom he had a profound aversion, and trying to gain strength that he might be able to climb the steps at Versailles and to plead the sad cause before the king.<sup>1</sup>

A half century elapses. Behold the great adversary of Christianity, the man whose terrible laugh announces the fall of a religion which he accuses of all the infamies committed in its name, the man who denounces with a burning merciless satire the corruptions of the Church policy. Voltaire dies, and in his private letters I find, in his attempt to crush his adversaries, a lack of principle, a disposition for intrigue, an adroitness in plotting, a boldness in lying which knows no equal. By the side of Voltaire see a writer whose frankness moves and attracts you; he declares himself the disciple of nature and of the natural sentiments; he accuses Christianity of having slandered human-

<sup>1</sup> “In going up and down the terraces of the Tuileries he tells us that he tested his strength by the gentle slopes for the purpose of accustoming himself to going up and down—in order to be in condition for entering into the presence of the king.” *Journal of the Abbé Le Dien*. OCTOBER, 1708.

ity and in order to combat its withering influence, he seeks, on the stage and elsewhere, to show the generous emotions of the heart guided solely by the inspirations of its innate goodness. This man was Diderot, but his correspondence exists, and I read therein fearful words. He asks of Alembert if, putting rhetoric aside, there is a man who would not rather lose a daughter than his fortune. Near to him is Rousseau; he also, listening always to the voice of nature only, sought to reform the education of the human race, but he has written his confessions, and we read there that this great educator of humanity began by sending his own children to an asylum to get rid of them.

The end of the century comes. The greatest of modern tribunes makes the National Assembly of Versailles ring with his thundering voice against the corruptions and the venalities of the old régime, and, accused one day of betraying his cause, he vindicates himself in a splendid discourse which silenced his detractors. To-day we know that at the very time he was thus speaking, Mirabeau was sold. I could multiply these examples and ask you what under the first empire became of those many savage Jacobins to

whom the one word royalty seemed an outrage upon the liberty of the people.

But I have said enough, too much perhaps. Why do I recall these heart-rending facts? In the interest of a party? Alas! in looking at them closely one could find at need, similar disclosures in all parties. To insult human nature? God forbid! I have wished simply to remind you that we must always distrust appearances and go to the bottom of things. Do you wish to judge a man, to know if he is worthy of your confidence? Do not study him in public only, and when all eyes are upon him, when he is discharging his mission, sustaining his part. A glance at his inner life, the sight of one of his acts done in silence will reveal him better to you.

These reflections have come to mind in meditating on my text. This text is a letter of St. Paul, the shortest that he has written since it is contained in a few lines. On this page, written as it were incidentally, we no longer have to do with the teacher of the Gentiles, with the theologian, with the founder of our churches of Europe, we have simply before us a man writing to one of his friends. Now I have thought that this would be a striking opportunity of studying

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the character of St. Paul, and of taking him as it were unawares and in his true light. This then is the study, my brethren, to which I invite you to-day.

One day in a dark dungeon in Rome two prisoners met. One is Paul, a Roman citizen, son of a Pharisee, whose words had stirred Asia and Jerusalem, and who had come to the capital of the world to answer at the tribunal of Cæsar for having incited the fanaticism of his compatriots. The other is a pagan, a slave named Onesimus, who, after having cheated his master, fled and sought refuge in the great city where he was arrested. Paul converted the slave to the Christian faith, and when the doors of the prison opened to Onesimus the apostle who remained imprisoned, sent him back to his master, Philemon, with the letter which I have read to you. Such a fact seems to you very simple, but perhaps you will change your mind in examining it more closely.

Do you know what a slave was at that time? Let us speak of it coolly, or rather let us permit the men of those times to speak. Thirty years before Jesus Christ, a Roman savant named Varron classified the implements of labor into

three categories: "the dumb implements, to wit, the tool and the plough; those which utter inarticulate sounds, the ox and the horse; those which speak, the slaves." Long before him the great Aristotle had said, "How can one love slaves? Can one have affection for base tools?" They were, as a matter of course, sold, lent, given, bequeathed. When old, they were exposed on an island in the Tiber, where they often died of starvation. The Roman law, that ideal type of right in the ancient world, punished with the same penalty the killing a slave and a beast of burden. If a master was assassinated by one of his slaves all of his companions in service had to be tortured with him.

A Roman, hunting one day, was about to kill a wild boar, when a javelin thrown by one of his slaves struck the animal; exasperated at having been outdone, he had the slave crucified. Cicero, that enlightened and liberal spirit, witness of the fact and who relates it to us, asks himself whether perhaps such conduct would not be found somewhat severe. At any rate, this same Cicero apologized for feeling some regret at the loss of an old slave; to-day we would hesitate less to say that we regret an old dog. At all times

the master had over slaves the power of life and death, and often, after a feast, they were put to death for the amusement of the guests. Certain sages advised, it is true, to be sparing of blows upon them, but this was, they added, to preserve them longer. Indeed the contempt with which they were regarded was such, that five centuries after Jesus Christ, the philosopher Macrobius, certainly a high-minded man, wrote that the true sage dishonors himself in speaking with a slave.

It was one of these miserable creatures that Paul met at Rome in his prison. You know what was the nature of Paul—a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, violent by temperament, harsh and persecuting. The first time he is mentioned in the Scriptures, is at the death of Stephen, and, too young yet perhaps to be his executioner, he watches the garments of those who stone him.

See then, face to face, the slave and the former Pharisee. What have they to say to each other? Answer me, you who do not believe in Christianity. What would they have done if the Gospel had not been there? Ah! you do not like miracles, and you think it strange that we speak

of a revelation from on high. I will show you in this Roman prison a fact which nature will never explain. I will show you this Pharisee, transformed, feeling for this slave a deep compassion; I will show him to you all absorbed in the fate of this wretched creature, upon whom no other at that time, even among the best, would have deigned to cast a look, discovering an immortal soul in that creature crushed under the universal contempt, instructing him, raising him for the kingdom of heaven, loving him,—O marvel!—loving him to the point of calling him brother, a cherished brother, his own son, the son of his loins, and as if this were not enough, an other self.

Ah! you do not want miracles. Explain to me then this transformation. Tell me whence came this extraordinary power which all at once made to spring up in the soul of one of those Jews, whom Tacitus called the enemies of the human race, a charity so amazing. We Christians know it; it is Jesus Christ who, in redeeming by His blood both Pharisee and slave, embraced them in the same love and calls them to the same heaven; it is Jesus Christ who made them heirs to the same faith and

the same hope; it is Jesus Christ who made them kneel together under the same benediction in that prison changed by them into a sanctuary, and where for the first time, celebrating the communion of saints, they illustrate the family of the redeemed come from every tribe, language and nation, and which was to gather under the sceptre of the Prince of Peace. Arise, Onesimus, take up again thy chains; go, if need be, to suffer and serve again; thou bearest on thy forehead a halo, and in thy heart a memory which nothing will efface. There was found here on earth a man who called thee his brother and who begat thee to life eternal. Arms were opened to welcome thee, a heart did beat against thine. Go, bear to this world, which is ignorant of it, the news of that strange love, go show to those despots plunged in the slavery of the flesh, a soul emancipated from corruption and sin; go, poor slave, to fulfil the great mission which awaits thee!

It is thus, my brethren, that the dignity of man has been found again. His dignity! Is that enough? No, for as to this slave, St. Paul not only made a man of him, but by another miracle he made of him a loving heart. He taught



him to love his master, and, of all victories the most extraordinary, he taught him to serve him in loving him. Ah! that astonishes you and repels you, perhaps, and you would have liked it better if in giving him moral liberty, he had taught him rebellion. This is the reproach one casts upon Christianity to-day; weak doctrine, say they, feeble doctrine which has not sought to break the fetters of the slaves, which has not known how to raise up the oppressed. I hear the accusation and accept it, but with this reservation, that where you see feebleness, I see a divine energy which man had never possessed by nature.

You can only recognize power in revolt, and you cannot discover it in that admirable patience which will tire out the tormentors. Well, let us suppose for a moment your dreams realized. Servile war is proclaimed. The Gospel calls all the oppressed to a vast insurrection; the throne of the Cæsars totters, the blood of patricians and of priests flows in torrents; vengeance and envy follow without truce their exterminating work, and the old world is engulfed in a frightful massacre. What is to come of it? The reign of fraternity? Be not deceived! Hatred begets

hatred, blood causes blood to flow. If that is your ideal, it is not that of the God of the Gospel; He wished to give to men another spectacle; that of love victorious over hatred, that of mind victorious over force, that of a crucified King of souls and of the world. "When I have been lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me."

Here is the first lesson that I find in my text. Another feature strikes me; it is the manner in which St. Paul interposes with Philemon, in order to plead the cause of his unfaithful slave. I am not sure that I know another example of delicacy more exquisite, more ingenious, more insinuating, shall I say, and all the more remarkable because here all is true, and no flattery is mingled with it.

First, see with what care the Apostle appeals to everything which can dispose Philemon favorably toward the culprit. Philemon is a Christian; St. Paul recalls to him his faith, his charity well known to all his brethren; he writes to him, persuaded that Philemon will himself do more than he asks of him. See with what a noble tone the Apostle avoids imposing upon him his will. "Wherefore," he says to him, "though I

might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, yet for love's sake I beseech thee, being such a one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ." Paul the aged and prisoner of Jesus Christ! What a climax, my brethren, and what penetrating eloquence in those three simple words! The Apostle wishes to do nothing without the consent of Philemon, "that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly." "Yea, my brother," he adds, "let me have joy of thee in the Lord; refresh my bowels in the Lord."

I have recalled already the terms in which he spoke of Onesimus and how the tenderest epithets fell from his pen; but that is not all. Onesimus had been guilty of unfaithfulness, of desertion of his master. Now have you noticed with what tact St. Paul recalls this fact, avoiding everything which might exaggerate his offence, contrasting his present conduct with his past conduct? "He was formerly useless to thee, but now he will be to thee of great use."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is here a play upon words full of delicacy and untranslatable in French. Onesimus is a Greek adjective which means *useful*.

Is there not here the tone of the Master extending His hand to Mary who weeps at His feet, and saying to those who accuse her, "Why trouble ye her?"

And further on listen to these words: "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee aught, put that on my account. I will repay it." But one must quote the whole of this page, one must weigh each of these words where grace, tact, and nobleness of feeling have found an expression so delicate. And all this written by a Jew, by a former persecutor, in favor of one of those slaves of whom Roman wisdom said that it was degrading to speak with them!

Christian hearers, what do you think of such love as this? Up to this time you have perhaps only seen in St. Paul the teacher, who crushes human nature beneath his inexorable logic. The language of his epistles, at once harsh and mystic, astonished without attracting you, and you did not observe there, as in so many passages in detail of his letters, a heart glowing and sensitive, with attachments so keen, with emotions so profound. In a word, you did not know St. Paul. It was the fidelity, the consuming zeal which were presented to you, but

you would not have believed it possible to find in him what is most tender and touching in charity. You would never have expected from his vigorous pen those delicate considerations, those respectful courtesies, that wonderful regard for the liberty of others, that profound intuition of all that can move a soul, those tones at the same time so elevated and so pathetic. See what grace has done, and yet we are told that Christianity impoverishes human nature, dulls the feelings and weakens the affections, and I see noble hearts who will not cross the threshold because, deceived by the too frequent spectacle of a religion dry, cold, and without compassion, they tremble before a sacrifice which will leave their life sad and despoiled. Sad prejudice too prevalent among us!

No, Christianity is not contrary to nature, I mean to our essential and primitive nature, which on the contrary it seeks to restore and enlarge. That which it condemns, is our fallen and perverted nature, such as sin has made it, or rather has unmade it. The Gospel, that truth of God revealed to man, indicates itself in this, that it is just as human as divine. It makes alliance with normal humanity against fallen humanity,

with man such as he should be against man such as he is.<sup>1</sup> You have only seen that which it takes from you, see then what it gives you; see, under its fruitful breath, the regenerated heart expanding into a new life; see in place of selfishness, which is the bottom foundation of guilty passion, the charity which sacrifices itself; see this boundless world of devotion, a world with immense horizons, with limitless perspectives, because it is already heaven lived on earth. See, in a word, the heart of St. Paul,—in an age when everything congeals, and notwithstanding the bitter delusions of a life the most tried,—evermore large, more loving, more charitable, like a river which ever widens in its course, and whose current is rendered all the more impetuous by the very obstacles thrown up in its way.

Thirdly, what strikes me again in this epistle, is that it gives us, as it seems to me, the secret of the wonderful ministry and of the great success of St. Paul.

Have you reflected upon it? It is St. Paul, the heroic worker, laden with the burden of so many souls he has converted, so many churches

<sup>1</sup> A Monod.

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he has founded, St. Paul pursuing even in his captivity, by letters and by interviews with those who visit him, his victorious work; it is he who finds the time and the means of instructing this slave, of loving him, of converting him to Jesus Christ. I spoke in the beginning of the deceptions which the life of men who play a great part in the world, too often occasion when we look at them closely. But is it not true that here St. Paul becomes greater in our eyes, and that his exhortations, his appeals to the churches, acquire a new power when we see him thus, in secret, in the shade concentrating upon a poor and ignorant soul all the treasures of his intelligence and of his solicitude? As long as you had before you the public man, you could imagine that ambition mingled with his zeal, legitimate without doubt, but after all unworthy the founder of churches, who finds his recompense in his success; you could believe him stirred sometimes and excited by the mere earthly glory of his apostleship. But where is the glory, here; where the success, where the recompense? In what way would his ambition be flattered when Onesimus, overcome by his perseverance, should give himself to Jesus Christ?

Ah! I admire St. Paul in his giant activity, I admire him traversing the Roman world at the voice of the Holy Spirit and sowing the ground, preparing the way for a succession of *naissant* churches; Lystra, Derby, Pergamus, Antioch of Pisidia, Troas, Philippi, Miletus, Cyprus, Tyre, Cæsarea, Malta, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and many others. I admire him always ready, always courageous, braving vigils, fatigues, perils, persecutions, scorns, sufferings. But, if I must choose, he appears to me more grand, more wonderful when, in his prison in Rome, he bestows all his care and all his love on the soul of a slave.

But why contrast these two activities, when one is the sole explanation of the other? St. Paul teaching Onesimus—here is what explains to us St. Paul conquering the world for Jesus Christ. Churches after all are souls; churches founded are souls converted, and one does not convert but by loving. St. Paul elsewhere has revealed to us his secret, when, describing his ministry at Ephesus, he expresses himself thus: “Remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” Every one of you; the whole is there. In this



way of doing his work St. Paul was only following the example of his Master who, having come to earth to save the world, began by saving Peter, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael, Mary Magdalene, Zaccheus, nameless persons, the ignorant, the poor of the earth,—and who taught them as if it were for their sake alone that He came on earth.

Is there not here for us, my brethren, a lesson and a reproof? Is it thus we act? Are we acquainted with this charity, this great solicitude, able, if need be, to concentrate ourselves upon one soul until that soul be brought to the truth? Let me make one remark here. It is the tendency of our race to see in religion a social fact rather than an individual fact. The church, in the eyes of our fellow-countrymen, is an institution, rather than a spiritual family. Speak to a Frenchman of religion; immediately he will reply to you by speaking of the church, of its claims, of its enemies, of its struggles, and it is the questions relative to its social or political destinies which will arouse him. That which he will be slowest to comprehend is, what is before all else the most important for him, his direct and personal relations to God.

We ourselves yield to this current. We talk freely of our century, of its miseries, its sufferings and its degradations; we move in the pale and vague region of generalities, and, under the pretext of elevating humanity, we forget often the real man who suffers and perishes at our side. Suppose that in the reign of Cæsar Augustus we had been called by God to save the world; we would have founded religious works, published writings, attacked the epicurism and the scepticism of the age, demonstrated to stoics the futility of their cold morality, but we would never have believed that the surest means of attaining our end, was laboriously to teach, in a village of Galilee, some toll-gatherers and fishermen, to speak in passing to a woman of Samaria the words of eternal life, to open in a prison the soul of a poor slave to the truth. Who knows even whether if this fidelity in small things would not have seemed to us as labor lost, who knows whether we would not have sought a larger field for our activity, objects more worthy of our solicitude, of our love? Is this true? Well, let me show you, in drawing to a close, first of all that this tendency is a snare for ourselves, and then that it explains the futility of our efforts.

A snare for ourselves, and see how. Nothing is easier than to burn with enthusiasm for general causes; the imagination alone suffices for it; abstractions do not enlist the conscience. One deplures, for example, the corruption of the century, and the degradation of character; that is easy; but after these bursts of indignation he will not retrench in one item of his table, or diminish by a cent the luxury of his toilette or his furniture, nor will he resist one habit of indolence or sensuality.

Men talk of saving the world, and after being sincerely stirred at this sublime task, they make no effort to instruct the ignorant who are near them; they live, for example, side by side with their servants without asking themselves if they have immortal souls, they allow months and years to pass by without addressing to them a word of serious and Christian affection, and after having admired St. Paul instructing Onesimus, they will not even ask themselves whether God has not put some Onesimus at their gate and in their path.

Men talk of instructing the people, they applaud the efforts of noble men who follow this course; they are melted at the thought of the

misfortunes of the working class; but they never inquire with distress whether in some enterprise which they sustain, the profit which they draw from the investment is not deducted from the insufficient wages of the workmen, and whether they do not deserve that terrible apostrophe of St. James, "Behold the hire of the laborers which is of you kept back by fraud, and the cries of them are entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts." But they do not love to cross the threshold of the poor, but feel an invincible repugnance at the sight of poverty.

They speak of raising up the church, but they carefully avoid all too candid confession of their faith which might provoke opposition and scorn, and however they may desire, with passion perhaps, that the pulpit at the foot of which they are accustomed to sit should be closed against error, they will never go to speak courageously and firmly to a wandering soul of the way which leads to God.

Do you know what results from this? It is that we gain so little. And why? Because it is not ideas that will save the world, because abstractions and theories will never triumph over evil and sin; because something else is necessary

—the ardor of a heart which loves, which translates the truth into life; because that ideas, without love which fructifies, is the winter sun which shines, if you will, but under whose rays one can freeze to death. Once more, behold St. Paul teaching Onesimus, opening by his divine sympathy the closed heart of that slave, and instructing him far from the gaze of men, under the gaze of God. To thee, great apostle, faithful in little things and in the most obscure of ministries, belong the great success and the victorious activity; and to the Christian children of this century, the sonorous words and the numberless deceptions of life which are spent in accomplishing so little !

But we will not dwell upon these sad thoughts. Christian humility is not the mother of discouragement. Why should St. Paul's secret not be ours ? It is never too late to love, and the love of God sown in our hearts by the Holy Spirit can to-day, as formerly, bring forth wonders.

Church of Christ, Church of the nineteenth century, which groanest over thy unsucces and thy failures, and who, very far from conquering the world, hast often to count with tears the multiplying defections, lift up thyself, cast

off thy garments of mourning and shine with the rays of the glory of thy God: then march into the midst of this great people which surrounds thee, taking upon thyself their weaknesses, bearing their maladies. Stoop to perishing souls, seek and save the Mary Magdalenes, the Zacheuses and the Onesimuses, and while awaiting the glorious conquests which thy God hath in reserve for thee, rejoice with the angels of Heaven over one sinner that repenteth. Amen.

VIII.

The State of Doubt.





## VIII.

### The State of Doubt.

*“Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness.”*

PSALM cxii. 4.

As you perceive, my brethren, from the words which I have read, I wish to speak to-day to those who walk in obscurity, to those whose path, once perhaps bright, has gradually become involved in darkness. There are many clouds which can hide the light from us. Ignorance, error, sin, physical or moral sufferings, often spread their heavy shadow over the path of every man. It is not, however, to these afflictions that I wish to draw your attention. This subject would be too vast for my limited strength. I must restrict my theme for fear of resting in vague generalities, and of speaking really to no one in assuming to speak to all. It is solely to those who are in doubt that I address myself; I

wish to show them the truth contained in my text: "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness."

Have you not often wished that you had been born in one of those periods which were the heroic ages of humanity, when faith filled the soul, when through earnest struggles every one marched with enthusiasm to the defence of his cause or to the overthrow of that of his enemy, when men gave the whole soul to the service of their faith without doubting for a moment that in serving it they were serving God? The age we live in has other characteristics. A word familiar to all of us defines it precisely; it is a time of crisis. No lofty impulse, no powerful inspiration; on all sides analysis which disjoins and criticism which destroys! There are no longer resounding catastrophes as in the sixteenth or eighteenth century; but listen, and you will hear on every side the dull sound of the sapping which is undermining the old foundations. On all sides is disturbance. A feeling of distrust penetrates the most firm. There is not one who dares look upon the future with calmness, and who can announce with any confidence what the morrow will bring forth.

What is to become of the Christian church? Ought she to hope for a near revival? Shall we see her shake off her torpor and arouse herself to a sense of her great destinies? shall we see Catholicism take on new life, detach itself from the political issues which devour its substance, avoid the cause which is pressed upon it by a faction as violent as it is blind, refresh itself at the life-giving springs of the Gospel and primitive Christianity? Are we to see our own churches starting up under the powerful breath of the creative Spirit? From the bosom of those internal struggles which consume their best energies, in sight of a mocking world, must a powerful movement spring up? Is there a man born to whom, as to Luther, God will give the word of life and of renovation? Is there a great people preparing in obscurity to rise spontaneously at His voice? Or rather, must we wait to see the Christian cause more and more despised, rejected and hated? Must we see it baptized with the double baptism of the contempt of philosophers and the hatred of the people? Must we see it isolated and without influence in the midst of a humanity intoxicated with independence and pride? Is it persecution that

awaits it? Is it contempt? Is triumph near at hand? Who knows? Who dares say it? Who is willing to be the prophet of this troubled age?

But, if we know not what the future has in store for us, one thing at least we know, and that is, that for the safety of the church the present condition cannot last. Listen to truly Christian souls. They suffer, they groan, they wait. Upon the ruins of to-day they ask for a resurrection. Through sharp struggles they long after unity; and this in all camps and in all communions. Listen well and beneath the stinging words of controversy, beneath the keen attacks and anathemas of the sectarian spirit, you will come upon common words of humiliation, of sorrow, and of earnest aspiration toward a better future.

But this gloomy epoch we are traversing has its temptations and its perils. Uncertainty begets scepticism, and those even who believe in the triumph of the Gospel find their faith disturbed by the anxieties of the present hour. The firmest believers have felt at times the attacks of doubt; when they have need to cry out with that father of whom the Gospel speaks: "Lord, I believe. Help thou mine unbelief."—Mark ix. 24.

Now, it is of this state of doubt I wish to speak to you; it is against this tendency that it seems to me necessary to fortify you to-day.

There is a legitimate doubt which it becomes us to comprehend and respect. When a man has received religious faith simply as a matter of tradition and of heritage, when he has believed less in truth itself than in the authority which transmitted it to him, a day comes when he looks within himself, and asks himself why he believes. It is his duty to ask this of himself.

I know that according to a well-accredited opinion in France, a man should not discuss the religion of his country and his fathers, and that to respect tradition is in the eyes of many the first duty of a citizen. But there is in this manner of looking at religion something so savoring of contempt for it, that I cannot disguise the profound repugnance which I feel toward it. Thus, one would be Christian because he was born in France, just as he would be Mahometan were he born in Turkey; and propriety would demand that on no consideration shall one discuss the faith in which he was brought up. They say that religion thus understood has powerfully contributed to establish the most lasting and the

strongest nationalities; the pretense is made to associate it indissolubly with patriotism; and it is by the support of such arguments that we hear it asserted every day that France should always be devoted to the interest of the Holy See, because she is the nation of Clovis and of St. Louis.

But what they do not say is that this is a return to the Pagan principle which assigns to every nation its gods and its altars; that thus they degrade that universal religion which according to the words of St. Paul knows—"Only one God, who is above us all, among us all, and in all." What they do not say is, that in pretending to serve religion they actually inculcate scepticism, for what is this but a religious truth which reaches only to the frontier and which changes with nationalities? Truth on this side of the Pyrenees, error beyond. A stream suffices to change doctrines. It is the duty of a good Frenchman to serve the Roman Church because, as they tell us, it founded our nationality. And since it was the Reformation which made the greatness of Germany, every good German should be equally devoted to the cause of Luther. But beyond the Vistula, there is an immense power which has grown under the shadow of the sym-

bol of the Greek Church; while at Constantinople there is a vast empire which has had Mahomet's crescent for its flag. What is the final word of this system? It is national religion, it is religious war in which each leader pretends to invoke upon his flag the blessing of God. And do you not see that religion, thus put to the service of politics, will descend with it into all its intrigues and all its passions; that it will be but an instrument of dominion and conquest? For myself, if one should ask me to enumerate the causes which have cast the greatest discredit upon Christianity in our old Europe, I should cite this first. Oh! I say it with earnest conviction, may that day soon come when earthly governments will no longer assume to protect religion, when they will no longer, in return, demand of it selfish prayers which change with each country, and with each revolution in the same country! May that day soon come, for then the church, compelled at last to look only to her Divine Head, will better understand than she has ever done the reality of His presence and His victorious power! Severed from the delusive protections which compromise her more than they serve her, she will prove to the world, which

brates of her decline, her immortal youth and her strange vitality.

We must, then, give account to ourselves of our faith, my brethren; it is a right, it is a duty. The Gospel does not impose convictions, it would have these convictions free and sincere. Nothing equals the profound respect of Jesus Christ for the human soul; He never does it violence, never takes it by surprise, and never even carries it away in a rapture of enthusiasm. Need I recall to you here the language of St. Paul, the care with which he refrains from lording it over the faith of others, his incessant appeals to the intelligence, to the investigation, to the personal experience of those to whom he writes? Now all investigation involves the possibility of doubt. To seize the truth we must separate it from error, and this supreme question formulates itself in the conscience, "Have I the truth?" Formidable question, but one which no one has the right to evade.

I know many men who would like to shirk it. "It is investigation," say they, "which ruins us; it is investigation which destroys faith." I deny it emphatically. And first, I ask if religious sentiment is weaker, less profound in countries



where there is investigation, than where books are closed, mouths stopped, inquiry stifled? What do we see around us? Know that what I complain of, is that men do not investigate, that religion seriously occupies only the smallest minority, that men plunge into unbelief as once they did into tradition, blindly, on the authority of certain leaders. It is always the faith of authority; only the professor of atheism some day undertakes to share the place which has been filled hitherto by the priest, and is listened to with the same docility. Fanaticism in place of fanaticism,—I do not give to it the name of conviction,—and when I see the carelessness, the astonishing ignorance, the sectarian narrowness with which certain schools pretend to judge the Gospel, I have the right to say to them, “Do you know what you are talking about?”

But, if investigation be a duty, “is it always possible?” you will ask me. “Would you invite the ignorant, the simple, to deal with questions the most subtle, the most complicated?” No, my brethren, we make no such claim, and those who attribute it to evangelical Protestantism cast easy ridicule upon it, but at the expense of truth.

I believe, for my part, that the Gospel has its proofs for all kinds of minds and for all conditions of the soul. To some, it justifies itself by arguments which lay hold upon their intelligence. With others, it touches especially the conscience and the heart. It is not necessary to be a theologian to have excellent reasons for believing in Jesus Christ; and when, through Him, one has found the true God, when one possesses pardon, peace and the assurance of eternal life, he is standing upon ground which all the theologians of the world cannot shake. I go further and I assert that the greatest theologians, who have not had this experience, run great risk of passing by Christianity without having understood the first word of it. But he who has had this experience, be he a poor workman, be he the most ignorant of hodmen, he no longer believes blindly, for between his conscience and the truth there has been established that intimate accordance which creates convictions of sterling quality; and when with the tone of one convinced, he says to me, "I know in whom I have believed," I bow before his faith. Do not say then that investigation is impossible in such matters, and that there remains no refuge but blind faith. The Gospel

has its proofs for all, and the most decisive, the strongest, the most attractive are those which are common to the ignorant and to the learned, those which above all appeal to the guilty conscience, to the heart which thirsts for pardon, for love and for peace.

I have vindicated the need of inquiry and the legitimacy of doubt. Let me show you this by an example. We are in the first century of our era. The apostle of salvation by faith, St. Paul, has just landed in a city of Asia; he has entered the synagogue, and his earnest words have won hearts; a church is formed, but there are there former Jews, zealous for the traditions of their fathers; they see with alarm, with an honest indignation, a doctrine proposed which declares that the law of Moses is abolished, that the temple of Jerusalem must fall, that Israel is no longer to be the people of God, and that the very heathen can call themselves the children of Abraham. They remember the promises of the prophets announcing to Judah an eternal covenant with God, affirming that Jerusalem was to be the centre of the world towards which all nations would turn their eyes. If the words of St. Paul troubled them for a moment, they soon reject them with

alarm, as though from an emissary of Satan. They are carried away by their own zeal, and believing that they are serving Jehovah, they condemn, they curse, they anathematize without examining, without reflecting. Is not this the history of all fanaticisms; of that which pursued Christ before the sanhedrim and in the judgment hall with cries of hatred and holy anger; of that which in the streets of Ephesus cried out all one day—"Great is Diana of the Ephesians"?

Would you see, on the other hand, how doubt in penetrating into a soul can bring to it light? Look at that young disciple of the Pharisees, who after having assisted at the punishment of Stephen, goes away thoughtful and conscience stricken. He has heard the sublime prayer of the martyr and for the first time has been troubled; he has said to himself, "Am I not mistaken?" He will not at first listen to this doubt; on the contrary, to stifle this unfortunate voice, he shows a new zeal against the Christians, until one day when a thunderbolt felled him to the ground on the road to Damascus. The first doubt in the soul of St. Paul, was the first ray of the new day which was to enlighten him.

Thus doubt can be legitimate, it can be in accordance with the will of God. But on what condition? That it be produced by very love of the truth, that it have for its end to arrive at the truth. In this case it is, if I may so express it, but one of the sides of faith. From the same motive which makes me affirm the truth, I doubt in face of probable error, and I deny in face of demonstrated error. So, in another line of thought, hatred can be one of the phases of love; for, because I love justice and holiness, I hate and I ought to hate iniquity and pollution. But if the love of good involves the hatred of evil, according to those beautiful words of the Psalmist, "All ye who love the Lord hate evil," does it follow from this that hatred can be commended, and is it not evident that separated from love it is a perfect hell for the human soul? Now, what is true of hatred I apply to doubt, and I say: "Though doubt can be one of the means by which the love of truth shows itself, it does not remain less true that doubt is fatal to the soul, that it unconsciously degrades it, that it destroys it." This is what I am now to try and show you.

The question before us is *The State of Doubt*;

this is the malady which I demonstrate, and the effects of which I see everywhere. There are intellectual doubts. You have lent your ear to the conflicts of opinion in this troubled age. You have heard men discuss the proofs upon which faith rests; behind each truth you have encountered a "perhaps," which rendered it suspicious. You have seen acute minds treat Christianity as only one religion among others a little higher than the rest. You have heard negation reaching to everything and sparing nothing. One page after another must be torn from the Gospel; one story after another must be placed thereafter among the legends; the figure of Christ goes on losing its distinctive features and fades away in the twilight of the past. After Jesus Christ, there remains at least the living God, God the creator and judge; but lo, science affirms that these are superannuated dogmas, wholly human conceptions which must be left to children and childish people. These opinions startle at first, perhaps they terrify, but at last they are reiterated everywhere. Some day they knock at the portal of your soul. You resist, but they return to the charge. Arrogant and peremptory, or insinuating and complaisant, they haunt you, they beset

you. The angel of doubt lights upon you when you read the Scripture, he whispers in your ear words of cold irony, he sits by you when you listen here to the Gospel; when you bend your knee to pray, he says to you, "What good does it do?" He rises and approaches with you to the communion table; he mingles a sarcasm with your holiest emotions. An hour comes at last when the darkness invades your soul, when you look anxiously for your vanished faith, when you repeat with bitterness the words of Job, "I hoped for light, but behold the darkness."

All are not tempted in this way. Intellectual doubts are the portion of but few. But life starts formidable questions for all, even for the most ignorant. You look around you, and you see the church, which ought to be the kingdom of God on the earth, left to its fate, compromised, and often ridiculed through fault of its defenders. You see Christian faith remaining without effect upon life, and men who are called pious lacking in strict integrity; you see them selfish, narrow minded, proud as other men, implacable in their resentments, pitiless in their judgments; you perceive that religious strifes possess the secret of producing bitteresses of speech, a sort of odious

mixture of mildness and crabbed zeal, of pious effusions and calumnious attacks. You never think of inquiring whether the Gospel is responsible for all this, and when you see beside you men without faith, indifferent men, atheists, yet generous, benevolent, charitable, you let yourself gradually come to believe that Christianity is without influence. In this state of half-scepticism time passes, and every day the influence of the world and of life disturbs, wears away the convictions like water which, penetrating into the sloping ground, loosens it little by little, and makes it slide imperceptibly on the edge of the abyss.

Now for the proof! You pray, and are not answered; you try again and the heavens are closed and God remains silent. What! God does not hear! And where then are His promises? He does not take from me the temptation which besets me! He does not spare me the anguish under which I am about to sink! He does not give me my daily bread! He does not save that life upon which mine is hung! He does not give back to me that child for which I have blessed Him so often, and whose smiles, caresses and innocent confidence have so



often drawn me closer to Him! He lets him suffer, and die! He who is Himself father, He does not understand my anguish, when by a word or a sign He could appease it! Or, what is worse yet, He leaves that soul which is as dear to me as my own, a prey to error, to disorder, to the corruption which wastes it.

Then, in this excess of grief all is shaken, all crumbles away in the soul and even God Himself disappears. It is not that there is a constant doubt of God. That does not happen which is wished. Atheism offends too sensibly the reason, which, seeking instinctively a cause for everything, does not easily concede that the world alone can dispense with a cause. One acknowledges a God, but no longer believes in His love, or rather, as is more frequent, imagined that he alone does not experience its effects. By a monstrous error he believes himself to have become the doomed of God's wrath. There is something strange in this idea of a creature who believes that the Almighty selects him from all others to make him the object of His merciless and persevering enmity. One would be tempted to smile at it, if a smile were possible in the face of such agonies. In

vain do we make such misguided souls hear the most touching appeals of the Gospel. God, they think, cannot love them. Blinded by their grief, they have no discernment of His mercy, but only of His severity. "God must love us much to chasten us after this sort," say they with irony. They sum up their trials; they extract from them all the gall, they drink it to the dregs. Ah! Let us pity them, my brethren, for what distress can equal theirs? Let us pity them, for frightful as this attitude may be, it is perhaps better than indifference. Ye fathers who hear me, would you hesitate a moment between a rebellious son and a son whose heart is absolutely hardened toward you?

I have pictured to you some of the effects of doubt such as I have been able to observe them myself. Perhaps more than one of those who hear me has recognized his own sad history in this picture. Have you visited in your riper years the house where you were happy in your youth, where you had loved, a house once full of sunshine and joyous laughter; and have you found it now dismantled, sad and solitary? Have you seen the family table, the grandfather's chair, the hearthstone once so bright, and

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whose warmth was less than that of the hearts which encircled it. Have you traced with melancholy step the path where you revelled in your first dreams of youth, those dreams of infinite hope? Have you found again the seat where the long talks were protracted in the shade of evening, have you contemplated all this, with your heart rent by trials? Have there risen before you at each step sweet and dear images, appearing for a moment only to leave you the more sad and lonely? Have you stretched out your arms into the void to seize again this past which has escaped you forever?

Now, it is with the soul of man, as with his home, and those who doubt will comprehend me. Do you remember the day when first your soul opened to receive the truth, and when the God of the Gospel entered in? Do you remember your first tears of repentance and love? Can you hear the words of forgiveness and of peace which then filled your heart with unspeakable joy? Do you perceive still the white robe of the divine compassion descending upon you and entirely enveloping you? Do you see again past blessings which rise up on all sides and speak to you of the love of God? Do you re-

call the days begun in prayer, the holy promptings of conscience heeded, the selfishness overcome, and the works of devotion loved and followed? To-day you doubt, and when you retire into your soul, it seems as if you were wandering through an empty house where you call up only the remembrance of the dead. You doubt, and others know nothing of it perhaps, and as you sit here by our side, apparently offering up your prayers with us, you seem to yourself to have become a stranger to us. You say, "If they but knew my thoughts!" Our language of faith, of love and of hope expresses no longer what is in your heart.

Now, I address myself to you who recognize yourselves by these traits, I ask you, are you willing to remain in this state? Do you not feel that here you are dying so far as the true life is concerned?

You must come out of it, for your soul is sinking into the power of a growing paralysis; for, upon this vessel which the sea is carrying away, there is no longer a pilot at the helm, as it is tossed about in vain by opposing waves. You must do this, for your will becomes weakened in this divided life, inspiration fails you, and your

existence goes on sad and sterile. And do you not see that the world has gained all that the higher life has lost in you? Where are your works of piety and charity? What words of strength and consolation do you bear to those about you? What hidden sacrifices do you sow along your pathway? What ground have you conquered from error and evil? Where are your scruples in those matters which formerly troubled you? When temptation comes, where will your refuge be, behind what rampart will you take shelter? It is by faith the soul must live, and protracted doubt is death.

Am I telling you, my brethren, to escape from doubt by an exaggerated enthusiasm (*l'exaltation*)? Do I pretend to preach to you a blind faith? Do I induce you to cast yourselves in despair into the arms of authority? No, indeed, for exaltation is the intoxication of the soul and this is not what God wishes of us; what He bids you do, we will see presently; to-day let me at least give you one counsel.

However severe the attacks of doubt may be, there remains in your soul some ultimate convictions which have still for you a sacred character. If you no longer believe in certain teach-

ings of the Gospel, you yet believe perhaps that Jesus has come from God: if Jesus Christ Himself is for you but the most holy of men, you believe still that His word is truth. If criticism has robbed you even of this, you believe at least that God exists, and that He is just and good, If God is to you naught but an idea, you believe that good is worth more than evil, truth than falsehood, love than selfishness. Well keep hold of this supreme truth, and behind it shelter your soul.

When a country has fallen into the power of a foreign oppressor, when city after city has surrendered, when a detested yoke presses everywhere, if there are left some lofty souls, still capable of comprehending the value of liberty and independence, they choose a last refuge, and there in solitude they plant the flag of their country, in order to protest till the hour of independence; for, as long as that flag floats, they can hope for freedom. So, I say to you, when doubt shall have invaded your whole soul, when your convictions and your best hopes shall have receded step by step before it, take your stand behind one of those supreme truths without which life is not worth living, and which you

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can only renounce by suicide;—and there, my brother, upon that last corner of earth, dig with your hands, even unto blood, wet that soil with your tears, and then plant there the flag of faith. May it remain there raised by your faithful hand until the day of light and liberty; and if that day should not shine for you on earth, die at least in affirming that there is an eternal truth. God who weighs all things in His infinite justice will judge you in His mercy, and as for myself, without penetrating His judgment, I will remember that according to the promise of the Scriptures, light will rise sooner or later for those whose hearts are right. Amen.





IX.

The State of Doubt.

(SECOND SERMON.)



## IX.

### The State of Doubt.

(SECOND SERMON.)

*“Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness.”*

PSALM cxii. 4.

I HAVE studied with you, my brethren, the state of doubt and its effect upon the soul. I have pointed out the causes which most frequently produce it. It remains to me now to show you by what means this state can be combated.

Understand the end which I propose to myself. I am not to speak to sceptics, but to believers whose faith is disturbed. Nor do I by any means assume to touch here upon the objections which are raised to-day against Christianity, and which may have disturbed their faith. How could I accomplish this, were I so disposed? These attacks are innumerable. Not one of the truths which I hold has been spared,

there is not one upon which I have not heard pronounced in the name of science, sentence of irremediable condemnation: "What! Do you still believe in the supernatural," says some one of our brethren, who thinks he has freed his faith from every element of error, "do you not see that the supernatural has had its day!" "What!" some sincere deist in turn says to him, "you believe still in Jesus Christ, and do not see that the human conscience is the only revelation from God!" "What!" responds an apostle of the independent morality, "you cling still to that undemonstrable hypothesis that you call God, and do not perceive that the idea of the good and of moral liberty suffices the man who is seeking for truth!" "Stop!" a materialist equally sincere cries out to this last, "science does not know that conception which you call moral liberty."

What is the last word of this conflict? This last word has been pronounced recently in a public discussion by a writer of great talents.<sup>1</sup> "How can one speak," he exclaims, "of any fixed rule in morals. There is no other than success." Does not this recall to you, my breth-

<sup>1</sup> M. Emile de Girardin.

ren, the word of the Gospel, "Let the dead bury their dead"? And what is strange is that all, equally sincere, pretend to speak in the name of a science which wants no more hypotheses. Poor and noble science! what ruins accumulate in thy name!

You do not expect me to enter into such a discussion with you; I have no thought of it. I undertake, not to reply to such individual doubts, but to combat the state of doubt itself, that morbid condition which to-day is invading so many souls, and it may be your own. It is for me to show what one who has been assailed by it ought to do.

Jesus, finding one day at the gates of Jerusalem a poor paralytic who for thirty-eight years had dragged out a miserable existence, was moved with compassion and wished to heal him; but first of all He stopped in front of him, and said to him, "Wouldest thou be healed?" Now, let me, first of all, address this very question to you, oh ye who doubt! Will you be healed? Do you desire it? You complain of the uncertainty you are in, of your lassitude, of your indecisions, of that sickly debility which you allow to consume your days and your energy: you

envy, you say, the happiness of those who believe. It seems, to listen to you, that the state you are in does not by any means depend upon yourselves. Now it is precisely to this point that I call your serious attention. Are you sure, absolutely sure, that your will is in no degree responsible for it? You say that it is sincerity which compels you to this state. Well, I appeal now to this sincerity, and I ask you if there are not in doubt certain fascinations which you do not care to confess.

Let us speak first of intellectual doubts. Have they nothing which flatters your self-love? In meeting the question raised between one who says, "I believe," and another who shakes his head in dissent, to which does the world give the palm of intelligence? Is it not to the latter? Singular judgment however! Indeed if doubt were a proof of superior intelligence, we must conclude that such intelligence is common, for doubters are everywhere; and moreover ignorance, narrow mindedness, vulgarity of thought, prejudices of all kinds are not, as they should be, the distinctive attributes of believers. But still it is an understood thing that faith almost always betrays some weakness of mind.

Now, my brethren, think you that it is an easy matter to confess one's faith before the world? I ask it of the student as well as of the workman who may be listening to me; I ask whether, in the high schools as in the workshops, faith does not exact of him who professes it a courageous effort and often painful sacrifices; whether it does not excite ridicule or a kind of respect mingled with contempt? Notice that it has always been so. In the seventeenth century, for example, at a time when Christianity was outwardly accepted by all, I am struck by finding the ministers of the Gospel continually warning their hearers against respect of man and the fear of ridicule. At the bottom, the spirit of the world is ever the same; to be a Christian, one must be a witness before the world and the bearer of a truth which astonishes, irritates, and scandalizes it. Do you accept this task? Is there not here that which terrifies your weakness and your cowardice? If to-morrow a great current of opinion should pronounce in favor of the Gospel, would it cost you as much to believe and to confess your faith? Look within yourselves, examine yourselves, and answer.

Do you know what is the second charm of

doubt? It is the independence in which it leaves us. Every conviction binds us, and we are so sensible of this that when a man contradicts his conviction by his life, we condemn him without hesitancy in the name of simple morality. Here is the source of the best founded reproaches which unbelievers bring against Christians. At the least show of weakness, they do not hesitate at the word hypocrisy. If I am convinced that Christianity is a divine revelation, you see I am obliged to follow it: if, on the contrary, I only recognize in it the product of the human conscience, I pass judgment on it freely from the height of my reason. But between these two solutions there is a third, to wit, doubt, which leaves me free to go to the Gospel for religious emotions, and to think of it what I please. If I believe that God is holy and that He desires holiness, I must subdue the flesh, watch over my ways, and suppress evil desires. If I know no other check than the easy law of nature, I need not ask you what will be my morals. But between these two solutions, there is doubt, which settles nothing, and which leaves me free to follow the desires of my heart. If I believe in a crucified Master who demands of me sacrifice and



who tells me that selfishness is a crime, my conscience will reproach me for everything which has respect only to myself; if on the contrary I exalt only self, I can make of myself the centre of my life; but between these two sides there is doubt, which lets me oscillate between selfishness and self-denial while following the impulses of nature.

O doubters who listen to me, let me ask you one question. You have within you, as every man has, passions which you know well, which you know by the wounds they have made, perhaps alas, by the degrading bondage under which they hold you even to-day. You know their power to be great, I presume, and you are not weak enough to assert that they in no way influence your thoughts or your decisions. Well, if these passions could speak, would they be in favor of a belief which proclaims that God is just, that He is holy, that He is love, and that you ought to belong to Him?

No, it is not true that doubt is always painful, as is so often said in this age of lying sentimentality. The day when for the first time in the life of a young man, belief in duty is shaken, there is within him a stupefaction, I

admit, perhaps a dismay, but there is also a vast delight, the delight of revolt and of false liberty. Yes, if temptation seduces and charms him, I tell you that doubt will be to him a liberator whom he will love, whom he will bless.

Now he who knows his own heart, who knows with what repugnance we accept the yoke of God, with what eagerness we shake it off, let him tell us whether doubt has not its fascinations? Is it not certain that the will feels itself the more independent in proportion as faith in God becomes more vague and feeble; for, just as when the sun is setting our shadow on the ground grows longer and larger, so, as God sinks toward our horizon, our place on earth expands. Is it not certain that all the unlawful desires, all the evil powers of the soul love doubt, as wild beasts love the night? Is it not certain that nothing eases the guilty conscience so much as a *perhaps*, and that the Tempter hurls at it, in every crisis, for the purpose of calming its anguish and putting to sleep its remorse, the words which ruined the first man, "What! did God indeed say it?"

An example will make my thought clearer.  
Let us suppose a man who believes in the Gos-

pel, and meets on his way a temptation to which he yields and which leads him astray. At this moment two opposing paths of life open before him; one upward, into belief, into holiness; the other downward, into the material, into disorder. What shall he do? Alas! he will persevere perhaps in this double course, numerous experiences prove it, but if this double-mindedness shocks him, there remains but the two alternatives, either to sacrifice his life to his faith, or to sacrifice his faith to his life. The first is heroism, that heroism which makes the flesh to quiver and which Jesus Christ commands to His disciples under penalty of perdition: "If thine eye make thee offend, pluck it out and cast it from thee; if thy hand make thee offend, cut it off and cast it far from thee." But if he does choose not this bloody sacrifice, what will he do inevitably? He will shut his eyes to the light which condemns him, and, unable to deny it, he will try more and more to forget it. Let doubt come! He will welcome it with a secret but great delight, for doubt to him is sin unpunished, it is liberty to escape from God.

I know, my brethren, how humiliating such thoughts are for us. There are some who will

see in them insinuations insulting to the dignity of man. But Jesus Christ, who assuredly does not insult humanity, has too often returned to this subject to permit us to neglect it; and I add that there is not a Christian who knows himself who does not know by experience how closely doubt in the mind affects the character of the life. Now it is to this examination that I invite you in addressing to you the question of the Saviour, "Will you be healed?"

If in all sincerity of soul you wish it, what must be done to attain it? Such is our inquiry to-day; but even here a point detains us. We are asked if there is really anything to do in order to escape from such a state. It is said to us, "By your own acknowledgment, faith is a gift from God. Is it our fault if we have not received it? Does it depend upon us to believe or not to believe? Can we change the nature of our intellect, and receive as true that which seems to us untrue?" The remark is readily added, "You are very fortunate in believing." As to this last assertion, my brethren, I would like to admit that it is always sincere, but I cannot refrain from saying that most of those who hold this language, in reality care very little for this hap-

piness for which they envy us. What is faith in their view? It is the portion of the weak-minded, of the immature in intelligence, to whom the guardianship of authority will always be necessary, of women, of children, of cowardly spirits, of souls tired and torn by the struggles of life. Faith, in their view, is the shade needful for eyes too feeble to bear the light of science and reason. Indeed, for the moment they may envy those who believe, just as the man finds pleasure in regretting the candor and confidence of the child; but after all, since they imagine that their doubts are due to the maturity of their minds and that they have no power to recede, their opinion on this subject is summed up in the well-known maxim, that one believes what one can. Now I wish to confront this thought, and just as I have shown you the part which the will plays in doubt, to show you its part in faith.

There is here a fact which ought to strike you. The Gospel commands faith. Now the Gospel respects human nature; it never constrains it, it never does it violence; it asks always a voluntary submission. Yet it enjoins faith as it enjoins love. We are surprised at this, say all, it seems to us strange, impossible.

against nature, for how command love, how command faith? We love whom we can. We believe what we can. This seems very plausible: and yet, that one of all books, which best understands our nature, commands us to believe and to love. And observe that millions of souls enlightened, regenerated, saved by the Gospel, bless it for making it their duty to believe and to love.

Now I ask you, my brethren, whether God could enjoin anything upon us that did not depend in some measure upon our will. Were He to do so, where would be His justice? Let us follow this to the end. Were He to do so, the wicked servant in the parable would have been right when he cried out, "Hard and cruel master, thou reapest where thou hast not sown, thou gatherest where thou hast not strewn."

But what if I should show you my brethren that you yourselves agree with the Gospel, and that you are constantly affirming what it teaches? "One loves whom he can," you say. Are you very sure of it? Is that the language you use to your wayward son, when evil influences have inflated his self-esteem and alienated his heart from you? And when one to whom you had en-

trusted the happiness of a daughter—I appeal to any father who hears me—when he has disenchanted and blasted her life, betrayed her confidence and alienated her heart by his indifference and cruelties, do you accept his excuse when he pretends that one loves whom he can? “One loves whom he can!” Ah! I understand this maxim in the mouths of the advocates of loose marriages, and of licentiousness; I understand it among those who see nothing in love but pleasure, among those who have never felt all that is ideal and sacred in the wife and mother.

But whoever has truly loved knows that love is all penetrated with respect and fidelity, that it engages the soul with holy obligations. Yes, this wonderful life of love, in which you see at first but the free blooming of the heart, needs for its endurance and growth and increase, the profound and serious sentiment of fidelity; just as the stream needs banks to confine it that its pure current may not lose itself in stagnant swamps; just as at the hearth a watchful hand is needed to bring together the coals which scatter and would die out apart. Do you not know this? Have you not a thousand times felt the life of affection revive and throw out a brighter

gleam when the will interposes to subdue the evil movements of selfishness, unjust suspicions, mean resentments; when it bestirs itself to restore to its true and pure home the heart led astray by outward seductions and by the temptations of the world? Ah! the Gospel knows us better than we know ourselves, and it is because it knows us so well that it commands us to love.

Now what is true of love is true also of faith. See that man! he is at the age when ambition influences him, when he casts upon life a look of vast hope. At this moment temptation awaits him; his future is made, a path opens before him short and easy, and there, but two steps off, is wealth, success, fame. "What! that which I have so long dreamed of, that goal which I believed lost in the far distance, at the end of this rough path where so many others have died in the attempt,—I can attain it to-morrow, this prize is mine! I have only to stretch out my hand!" Yes, but for all that, there is for that man a condition: he must renounce his past convictions, he must trample on his conscience. "Is it only that?" the world asks him with its cold and cynical laugh. "Does not success absolve for



every thing?" He hears it again,—and the struggle commences in his soul, the struggle and the torment; awhile, it is the night of temptation which invades him, broken by blinding lightnings; anon, it is the pure light of truth. But if he is carried away by the world, if he comes out of these struggles corrupted and conquered by evil, will he believe in duty to-day as he believed in it yesterday? And if he succumbs before a new temptation, do you not see that these successive defeats, beating on his soul like the angry waves of the raging sea, will sweep away piece by piece all the beliefs which made his strength and his dignity. The will, then, can act on faith.

There are decisive hours when we are bidden more than ever to believe in all those realities which can be neither touched nor seen; and which are called honor, duty, conscience, humanity. You say, "One believes what he can," and every day you bid men believe that honor is worth more than success, dignity more than money, self-sacrifice more than self-love; and when scoffing scepticism answers cynically that experience teaches another lesson, you reply, that one must believe in the good and that doubt here is criminal. Thus, you acknowl-

edge, the will can act on faith. And so faith can be commanded. Now, this is exactly what the Gospel says. It is then certain that, in order to get out of your state of doubt, there is something for you to do. It remains for us to see what it is which must be done.

I will say, first of all, search; but search seriously; and I add, search not with your intellect alone, but with your conscience and your heart. I know that when we say this we shall be readily accused of practising mysticism and reproached for sacrificing reason. My brethren, I have no thought of sacrificing reason; it has its place in religion, and I have never found that it was depreciated or degraded in the school of Jesus Christ. We must love science sincerely, without reserve, and as it has no dignity except when it is independent, we must respect its liberty. Have we not moreover the history of all fanaticisms to recall to us the errors of the religious sentiment when it separates itself violently from reason?

I know that unbelief says boldly that science destroys faith, and that not a few believers tremblingly whisper the same. But what does that prove. When it is told you for example that science demonstrates that the human soul is a

pure hypothesis, and that moral liberty is a pure delusion, do you believe it? Has science spoken her last word to the materialists? Has she commissioned unbelief to be her authentic interpreter? Is this peremptory and arrogant language the tone by which she is to be recognized? Let us not be disturbed by these assertions, my brethren. Let them not provoke us to a foolish reaction; let them never make us sneer at or depreciate the human intellect. Let us remember above all that in such a matter anger and fear are unworthy of a believing soul, and that the invectives they prompt weigh no more than a hair in the balance, against contrary arguments.

It cannot then be a question of depreciating the intellect; but when we say that in order to return to God, the heart and the conscience are the shortest and surest roads, we have reasons for this which we beg you to examine seriously. I will only name three of them, which ought, it seems to me, to strike every candid man.

I say first that, if there is religious truth, it ought to be accessible to men of every degree of culture and of every position. Now, this condition is absolutely impossible, if it is the intellect pre-eminently which must grasp the truth, for

nothing is more unequal than gifts of intellect, nothing more arbitrarily distributed. I say that there would be something revolting in this new kind of predestination which would make the knowledge of God dependent upon the degree of culture, that is to say, in the vast majority of cases, upon the happy chance of fortune and education. I say that you do not believe in such a religion, and that, at all events, humanity would never want it. Now, mark well, it must be wanted, if it is the intellect above all which leads to God. On the contrary, appeal to the heart, to the conscience; here, you are on the broad ground of equality before God. Of what value are birth and fortune here? Well, it is by these great pathways that the God of Jesus Christ, who is the Father of all without respect of persons, means us to come to Him.

Oh! how I can understand the rapture of Pascal writing with tears of joy on the night when he returned to God: "God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, not of philosophers and savants." Noble tears of a genius who had learned to know that God reveals Himself to the heart, noble tears which recall to me the rapture of a greater than Pascal, of Him who

exclaimed with bursting joy, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes."

Such is my first reason; the second is this: If God exists it is evident that our relation to Him must be one of dependence and humility. Now, I remark that the intellect alone does not produce these dispositions. Why? Because the intellect examines, criticises, and judges: these are its proper functions. Now, it is the tendency of him who judges to place himself above him who is judged, or at least on a relation of equality with him. Is it after this manner, I ask you, that he can meet God? Let me suppose a man thus approaching the Gospel; he studies the history of Jesus Christ; it is to him, if you will, a subject of great and curious interest; he examines, he wonders, he compares; then he perceives that between one gospel and another, there arises a first difference, then a second; he meets here and there supernatural facts which evidently he cannot accept; he concludes that it is almost impossible to accept the authenticity of the sacred narrative. For him the question is settled, the Gospel is judged, and in good faith he

believes the problem solved, for he has only seen here a question of historical criticism.

But here is another man who seeks the truth with sorrow, with anguish; he suffers and he feels himself guilty. Will you say that these are unfavorable conditions for reaching the truth? Yes, apparently, if it were a question of mathematics; but for this man it is a question of knowing the law of his destiny, it is a question of knowing whether his life is ruled by fatality or by the love of God. Will you say that he has not a right to try to satisfy his conscience and his heart? What! you admit that he is solving all problems, and that he should leave unsolved the very ones which disturb the lowest depths of his being! By what right would you forbid him? Now, this man opens the Gospel, he listens to Jesus Christ, and lo, he understands what God is for him, and what he should be toward God. To the ideal of holiness which Jesus Christ presents to him, his conscience responds with a profound consent. "Yes," he says to himself, "if God exists, this is just what He must ask of me!" But what a distance between that ideal and his life! He recognizes it sadly, and the cause of his miseries and his sufferings ap-

pears to him clear and distinct. He feels himself guilty; the more he studies himself, the more has he need of pardon, and when this pardon is presented to him in its magnificence and holiness, he believes in it, he accepts it, because this is what he needs.

I have traced here the history of more than one of those who hear me. It is just in this way we are brought back to God; our troubled conscience, our heart deceived by the world have led us back to Him more surely and more quickly than reason would have done. Well! when we have re-entered by this path into order, into the true life of obedience and of a holy love, who will dare tell us that we are deceived?

Thus, in the name of the Gospel, in the name of the experience of all believing souls, we say again to those who are seeking God: Search, but remember that the God of truth does not reveal himself to curious minds. Quit that lofty attitude from the height of which you pretend to dictate to Him the conditions upon which you will deign to surrender yourselves. Listen to the voice within which accuses you; listen to the deep unrest, the groanings of your heart which longs for pardon, for love and for peace; bow

yourselves as sinners, before the God of holiness, humble yourselves, for this becomes you; it is to the humble, the Scripture has said, that the Almighty points out the path which leads to Himself.

My third reason is this. If there is religious truth, it ought to make us better. You think as I do, for a thousand observations which escape you proceed from this principle, and whenever you see injustice, pride and avarice allied to religion you pronounce thereupon a sentence which accords with what I assert. Yes, religion ought to make us better; and this recalls to me one of the most beautiful sayings of antiquity.

Socrates was talking with one of his disciples, and by one of those prophetic flashes which strike us in his teachings, he announced that one day a personage would come who would reveal what God is. "Let Him come, let Him come," replied his disciple, "let Him command me as He will. I will do everything, provided He makes me better!" Admirable word! Provided that He make me better. Ah! he who said that, was not far from the kingdom of heaven. Well, what is the shortest way to make ourselves better, to transform ourselves, to sanc-



tify ourselves? Will you hesitate to reply? Do you not see every day men who know and do not, men capable of admiring everything even the purest sacrifices, and incapable themselves of sacrificing anything. And you yourselves, have you not groaned to see how mere knowledge is powerless to change the will? You saw the good, but you were incapable of doing it. You contemplated holiness, and you remained slaves to evil desires. It is that you lacked the inspiration; it is that to ask knowledge alone to change the man is to ask the pale winter sun to ripen the fruit, and make the harvest golden. It is the heart that must be touched. It is to the heart that the God of the Gospel speaks, because, as the Scriptures so admirably express it, "out of the heart are the issues of life." —Prov. iv. 23.

I have shown the part which the heart takes in the search after truth.

Now, the heart, my brethren, has its own language, and this language is called prayer. Does the heart deceive itself when it thirsts for love, and when it believes that infinite love can hear and answer it? Are you sure that the heavens are empty? Were those deceivers who,

before you and in your own day, have accomplished the holiest work, the most difficult self-sacrifice, and who say that their strength was drawn from that secret spring of prayer? We weary ourselves with vain reasonings, we ask ourselves, whence we come and whither we go; but can we not say these words, "O thou who has made us, deign to deliver me from my doubt and misery?" Who cannot pray thus? Who is not inexcusable, if he does not try to found his faith on prayer?

"Indeed, prayer is ever on our lips in our intercourse with our fellow men. God has not intended that we should be sufficient unto ourselves; and in like manner it has been His will to give us that by which our mutual needs may be satisfied, in such a way that we may always be subject to asking and being asked."<sup>1</sup> Every human society rests thus upon mutual dependence, and prayer forms the very woof of it; it passes continually from one to the other, knitting between us ties of sympathy, of obligation, of gratitude, of reconciliation, of reciprocal condescension. A society without prayer—have you ever thought of it?—would be barbarism, it

<sup>1</sup> Aug. Nicolas, "The Art of Believing," II. 83.

would be the isolation of selfishness and death. You feel it, and yet you, who pray to men, do not understand that you must pray to God, and that here in this dependence so reasonable of the creature upon the Creator, of the sinner upon Him who pardons, of the child upon his Father, is found the source of life, of light, and of truth. Believe in your heart, which calls upon God, which brings His name to your lips in all your griefs. Seek God, follow Him, ask and it shall be given you.

I have told you how you must seek for God. To this first counsel I add another. Place yourself in direct contact with Jesus Christ who alone has revealed God to us. How many doubts will then vanish imperceptibly! First of all, intellectual doubts. You had compared systems, discussed contrary arguments, and in this chaos of opposite opinions you fluctuated irresolute, but you were brought near to the Master, you heard Him, and a calm ensued. Whence did it come? From the prestige or the eloquence of His word? You had no thought of it; it was the radiance of the truth directly penetrating your heart; His words fell upon you with an accent of irresistible authority; even as He spoke, it seemed to you

that the sky opened and unrolled itself before your eyes. How many the doubts and objections which have thus fallen at the feet of Jesus Christ in the hour of sorrow, of mourning and death, just when human words are so absolutely powerless! How many souls comforted by His simple touch! It has been truly said, that one is not warmed simply by knowing what elements compose the sun and by what laws it shines upon us. Better a thousand times to put one's self under its rays. It is the same with the Sun of souls. And it is also by the light of Jesus Christ that you will see the doubts vanish which come to you from the view of life and the apparent fatality of things.

I have shown you how this view disturbs faith; first in seeing the life of Christians, in witnessing their faults and their falls, the conclusion is drawn that the Gospel is without influence; and then in seeing them left like others to the thousand hazards which seem like chance—it is concluded that God does not interpose in their destiny. Well! do you not feel that these doubts will surely disappear for him who is in close communion with Jesus Christ, who thinks of Him and listens to Him? He will

be the first doubtless to see the faults of Christians, he will deplore them, he will grieve over them, but they will never make the believer forget the splendor, the moral beauty which he sees in Jesus Christ Himself. Yes, I confess, it, the miseries of believers, their meanness, their sordid passions, their harshness, their bitter judgments, are one of the mysteries which most painfully perplex us; but, shall I say it, it is when seeing how imperfect the best are, how under the most benign influences the heart can become hard, that the Gospel seems to me so much the more beautiful, sublime and divine. This atmosphere so serene and so pure, I feel that it does not rise from here below, that it verily descends from the skies. And as to the doubts which come from the apparent fatality to which God abandons us, who can better forewarn us against them than the Gospel? Is it not here that we are continually brought face to face with the plan of God in our education? Is it not here that we learn to walk by faith and not by sight? Where are illusions encouraged in the Gospel? When have you ever seen a page of it, even a line, painting your existence in false colors and warranting you to count upon out-

ward signs radiant with Divine agency? When have you seen here that the multitude would be on the side of truth, that the Christian life would be easy, that the church would escape the humiliating conditions which the miseries and weaknesses of her own children joined to the opposition of the world make for her?

Disciples of the nineteenth century, remember the first disciples, remember the trouble which filled their souls when they saw their Master crucified; remember their distress, their discouragement, their bitter despair. And yet, did the Master hide that death from them? Did He ever proclaim to them success and popularity? Had He not often held up before their eyes His bloody cross? Yes, if they had remembered His words at the critical hour, they would not have doubted; but, infatuated by their own dreams of earthly grandeur, they did not even listen to Him. Disciples of to-day, how many of your doubts would disappear if you knew how to wait at the feet of the Master and listen to Him?

I have tried to point out to you, my brethren, how you can regain Christian truth when it is hidden to your eyes. I have shown you the

paths by which many prodigals have returned to their Father's house. Before leaving this subject there are yet two counsels I would like to give you.

The first, which I have already given when speaking of convictions in general, and which appears to me even more necessary when the question is as to Christian faith, is this: when your beliefs are shaken upon a point, even upon an important point, take care that you do not thence conclude, by a blind and hasty logic, that your entire faith must be involved in the fall of one of your convictions. Hold fast, rather, then, more than ever, the truths in which you yet believe, and live up to what remains to you while waiting to recover what you have lost. I know that this is not the way in which many believers regard it. It is a very popular saying with certain men of authority, and one that unbelief loves to repeat, "All or nothing." All truth, or absolute doubt; all light, or all darkness. I know this maxim, and in the name of the Gospel and of experience, I call it a miserable sophism.

They tell us, "Truth is one! No one has the right not to accept the whole of it; who touches

one stone makes the whole edifice totter." Yes, without doubt truth is one in itself; but truth in itself is one thing, the truth in the mind of him who receives it is another. Now, do we receive the whole of it in a day? Are you to-day where you were yesterday! Have we, you and I, apprehended the same truth in the same manner?

We must always return here to the example of the Master. How did Jesus form His disciples? Did He impose upon them truth in subjecting them to His authority? Did He bow their heads and their hearts under an inflexible system? Undoubtedly He commands them to believe, and a moment ago I showed you why. But is that a forced belief? And do you not remember at the same time His wonderful condescension, His respect for the human soul, the Divine patience with which He bears the errors of His disciples, their failures, their prejudices, their backslidings,—that patience which never failed Him, but when He sees obstinate unbelief, when He must needs cry out, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I bear with you?" Is faith with Him the full-grown tree? Is it not rather the grain of mustard seed which must slowly ripen and germinate? Did all those who



followed Him at once understand Him in the same way? Thomas and Philip, did they think all at once as Peter thought, and feel as John the beloved apostle felt? And the training to which the Master subjected them, ought it not to show us in every age how sincere souls reach the truth?

And yet men go on saying, "all or nothing," and we have the sorrow of seeing, in France, souls vacillating between absolute unbelief and a religious system which logically applied would take us back to the Middle Ages! Behold that young man until now quietly bending beneath the yoke of the Church; one day in his studies, he learns that the court of Rome solemnly condemned Galileo and repudiated the detestable error of the movement of the earth. That is enough! For him, that day, Christianity is wholly shaken—the Gospel, its hopes, its teachings, Jesus Christ and His cross, even moral life itself, all totter before his eyes, all plunge into the void of a universal scepticism.

Well, we must say it boldly that this is folly, we must reject such a method which in enforcing truth spreads unbelief and death. What! Because upon one point your faith is

troubled, will you abandon all the rest? Because in the Old Testament you meet with facts which surprise you and which confound you, will you cease to bow before Jesus Christ? Because in the teaching of Christ Himself, there are some words before which you stop hesitatingly, will you listen to it no more? No! no! my brother, you will not do it. On the contrary, in these divine words, you will grasp those which touch your heart by an irresistible evidence, you will walk by the light which is given you, you will remember that to him who has shall be given, you will not hide your talent because you have received but one; faithful in the little you have received you will receive more, and who knows but that one day you will precede us in the kingdom of heaven?

Finally I say to you, and it is with this I will close, act according to your faith, do the works of your faith. You believe that God is holy, and that your life should be pure; you believe that God is love and that we must love even to sacrifice; do this, and I venture to say to you, that to-morrow you will have more faith. I remember what my Master replied to those who came to Him and asked Him what they must do

to obtain everlasting life. "Fulfil the law," said He to them. It is not that any one is able to do this. And if we could, why should Jesus Christ have come on earth, why the cross, why redemption? But is it not in seeking to fulfil the law to the end, that one learns to understand one's self, to sound his misery, to despair of his strength, and to demand a Saviour? Candid doubter who listens to me, I have often heard you say that if there was nothing in the Gospel but the sermon on the mount, you would accept it wholly. Now I take you at your word, and I say to you: carry out the sermon on the mount, and if you do it faithfully, I will await the result, and I will meet you humbled, repentant, and Christian.

Yes, suffer for truth and righteousness, become poor in your own eyes, try to pardon those who offend you and to love them, avoid not only the crime but the evil desire, the first appearance of hatred and the unchaste look; hide in the darkness thy beneficence; pray in secret; be, in a word, if thou canst, perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect; and then come to-morrow and tell us like the rich young man, "all these things have I done," and I will reply, "yet one thing

thou lackest: go and free thyself from the illusions which blind thee. Foolish man, thou thinkest thou hast fulfilled the law, and seest not that thou art poor and miserable and naked."

Yes, take the law in earnest, and in the name of the Gospel, in the name of all men who through the law have arrived at grace, I will say to thee, "Obey the truth, and the truth shall make thee free." Jesus Christ said, "He who follows me shall not walk in darkness." He did not say, "He who looks at me," He said, "He who follows me."

Follow Him, my brethren, in humility, in self-denial, in sacrifice. Then, convinced of all you lack, weak, burdened with the sense of your misery, you will call for deliverance and you will seek for pardon; then to you will be fulfilled the words of my text, "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." Amen.

X.

Discouragement.



## X.

### Discouragement.

*"I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for naught and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God."*—ISAIAH xlix. 4.

EACH epoch has its special temptations and trials. In the spiritual as in the physical world we find at certain times widely prevailing diseases, so much the more formidable because while all are subjected to their influence, none perceives the whole danger of it. Now, for Christians of to-day, one of these maladies is discouragement.

Discouragement! not in that acute and passionate form which strikes us in the bitter and despairing complaints of the prophets and believers of other centuries. We know little of those inner dramas, those outburstings of great

souls deceived by the heart-rending spectacle of life and of the world. We suffer from a less violent ill, less dangerous in appearance, but dull, slow, and treacherous.

Many causes explain it to us. The human mind, in its progressive march, passes by turns through phases of assurance and of disturbance. There are centuries when one sees truths generally accepted, which suffice fully for thought and action. Such for example was the seventeenth century when in the social order, monarchical traditions,—in the religious order, the authority of the Church with Catholics, that of the Bible with Protestants,—were the very elements of everyday life. And so, though in an entirely opposite sense, was the close of the eighteenth century—when confidence in the sovereignty of human reason, in the natural goodness of man, in his endless progress, intoxicated minds and hearts, even to the moment when Terror, in its dreadful explosion, showed what there was underlying these dreams.

There are other centuries, when, far from believing and affirming, man, disconcerted, stops and seeks out his path. What had been accepted hitherto no longer suffices him. He



wants to analyze, to sift, to call in question everything. This tendency in itself is legitimate, but it has its dangers. The property of analysis is to *decompose* the objects which it studies. Now it is evident that the analytical spirit, if it predominate exclusively, is fatal to the creative spirit, to enthusiasm, to religious faith, to all those impulses by which the soul instinctively seizes the sublimest truths. Take it then for certain that at an epoch when analysis is carried to excess, the vital powers of the soul become weak and are in danger of dying. Now, one of the first fruits of this tendency in religious minds, will be languor. How can one love, act and believe, when at each of its aspirations the soul finds planted before it a *perhaps*; when in every man, beneath the heart which feels and would fain live, there is the inquisitive reason which discusses, which staggers, and scoffs?

If this spirit of analysis is destructive to individual enthusiasm, it acts in a still more enervating manner upon the collective life. Nothing is more rare to-day than energetic action under common impulses. The Church, like society, divides itself up. Every one asserts his independ-

ence, his right to examine; and often the spirit of party alone replaces the unity which disappears. I do not pass sentence upon this tendency; I believe it providential, necessary. I believe that the external or wholly political bonds which have hitherto united souls in the same Church by right of birth and of tradition, should be broken, and that in future it is upon the ground of a common faith that unity should be sought.

But without enlarging upon this thought which does not fall in with my subject, I affirm that this dull process of disintegration disturbs us all; that, born to be members of a spiritual family, made to love, to believe and suffer with sister souls, and feeling all our moral strength multiplied tenfold by sympathy, we do not pass unscathed through our era; impulse fails us, and for want of being drawn on by one of those vast currents of life and of zeal which have often swept over the world, we fall into apathy and discouragement.

That is not all. Our age has another character; it is, it wants to be, practical. The enormous progress of exact sciences and the wonders of invention attract minds with strange force

toward this lower world. Men believe in what they touch, in what they feel. A scorn scarcely dissembled confronts inquiries which reach beyond the world of sense or of pure logic. The supernatural passes for mysticism, and this word, with many, is a condemnation without appeal.

This tendency reacts on the Church. It is certain that the same utilitarianism is invading it. A religion of facts and of sentiments is desired. When preaching sets forth pre-eminently the great Christian doctrines, when it shows the divine supernatural side of revealed truths, it loses its interest. Our hearers, without knowing it, wish to have to do with man rather than with God. If we speak to them of themselves, of their struggles, of their doubts, of their temptations, of their sorrows, their sympathy and emotion are awakened. If we fathom the revealed doctrine, their interest languishes. But this, believe it, is fatal to the soul. It is neither good nor healthful for man to dwell too long upon himself; it is not thence that he will ever draw strength and elevation. The Gospel has wonderfully understood this, since it tends always to lift our thoughts on high toward "the hills from whence cometh our help"; on

high, that is, toward the upper world, toward Him who when here was the living image of the invisible God. The great epochs of life, of faith, of powerful action, have been those when Heaven has opened upon humanity. Man in depending upon himself, can become but a stoic, and the last word of stoicism is despair and suicide. Thus, always when religion is, and wants to be, only human, it produces discouragement.

These are some of the causes which will explain to you the condition in which so many souls languish at the present time. Add to these the influence of certain tendencies of spirit and temperament, causes entirely physical, which act in a mysterious but powerful manner on the moral state. Add to these that inclination which the most serious minds have to look on the sad side of human things. Add those tendencies which exist in all ages, but which, in the general condition which I have just described develop with much more power and rapidity;—and you will comprehend why nothing is rarer in these days than that joyous, heroic, serene faith which characterized other ages; you will understand that discouragement is an enemy

which must be combated at all hazards. All feel it, all mourn it.

In certain circles it is sought to escape from it by excesses of feverish zeal. The imagination is excited by the prospect of the immediate realization of the promises of prophecy. There is thus produced an enkindling more or less sincere; but this galvanic excitement is soon followed by a more profound prostration. These fictitious but intermittent flashes only terminate in changing this languor into incredulity. What must be done then? you will say to me. I will answer you, Build up your life on another foundation than that of your passing impressions; fix it upon the central, eternal truth which dominates over the fluctuations of opinions and beliefs; live in Jesus Christ; and upon the heights to which this communion lifts you, breathe the vivifying air which alone can give you strength. Then only can you oppose faith to sight, the eternal to the transitory, and thanksgiving to discouragement. But this is to tell you that you must be, must (it may be) become again, Christians. Now this remedy, the only efficacious one for the evil under which we all suffer, is not to be reached in a single day.

I agree to it; so, after having pointed it out to you, I hasten to descend with you upon the ground of immediate action. Let us inquire under what forms discouragement most frequently takes possession of us, and by what weapons it can be repulsed. This invisible and gloomy enemy which attacks us secretly in the twilight of our vacillating faith, let us bring it out to-day into broad daylight; let us look at it with a firm straightforward look: to understand it well, is already to have half vanquished it.

In going to the bottom of things I discover two principal causes of the discouragement of the Christian. The first is the greatness of the task which God sets before him; the second is his inability to accomplish it.

I say *first*, the greatness of the task which God sets before us. What! doubtless some enthusiastic soul will reply to me, is it not this very greatness which kindles in the heart of the Christian an ambition that nothing can extinguish? Yes, I agree to it, we are so constituted that every time the ideal of love and holiness to which the Gospel calls us, is presented to us in its sublime beauty, our heart vibrates with a profound assent, and we feel that it is for this

end that we were created. But when we must not only admire but act, when we must no longer let the imagination kindle at a perfection which ravishes it, but must realize this perfection in life, then we measure with dismay the distance which separates us from it, and discouragement seizes us.

See what takes place in human affairs. Let a commonplace mind propose some end commonplace like himself, it will cost him but little trouble to attain it; artist, thinker or poet, he will be easily satisfied. But let a true genius conceive a sublime ideal, let him seek to reproduce it, you will hear him mourn over his failures. Each of his efforts will perhaps produce a *chef-d'œuvre* which will satisfy everybody but himself. It will be like the greatest poet of Rome commanding that his immortal work be burned at his death; like Saint Cecilia, according to one of the most beautiful legends of the middle age, breaking her musical instruments when she hears in the distance the chorus of angels.

Suppose now that the Scriptures had proposed no other end for us to attain than worldly integrity, that wholly external probity which looks to the outside of life, which confines itself to the

worship of honor and decorum. All would aim at it without doubt, for all would be confident of reaching it. But when it is a question of being holy before God as well as before men, of subjecting to the divine law not only our acts, but our intentions, and of bowing day after day, hour after hour, under the sanctifying discipline of the Spirit of God,—then the further we advance, the farther off seems the end, and the very greatness of our task rises before us sometimes, as before one in a nightmare there rises a huge wall which must be scaled at all hazards.

Let us suppose again that the Gospel had proposed to us no other ideal of charity than the love of country, and that it called upon us to seek in humanity only the triumph of a political system; none would recoil before this end. But you all know that it demands something other than this. You know that it prescribes for us not only that love of our neighbors, which is after all only an enlarged selfishness, but charity, and, if need be, charity which goes even as far as sacrifice; you know that it spreads before us like an open field all the miseries, all the sufferings of humanity; that it does not permit us to ignore even the cries of distress which



come to us from the extremities of the world. You know that it forbids us to repose in our ease and in a satisfied selfishness; that it binds us in some measure to all the sorrows which surround us; that it cries out to us as to Cain, "What hast thou done with thy brother?" and that before our cowardice, always ready to give up this sublime task, it lifts up like an accusing image, the bloodstained and divine form of crucified Love.

Now, this is what terrifies us, this is what wounds and irritates us. Oh! how much more would we prefer a religion which leaves us to ourselves, and does not invade our independence and lay its hand upon our heart! Shall I dare to say it? There are times when all the wicked powers of our soul angrily revolt against that law of love and holiness; times when we say to God, "Why hast Thou made it known unto me? Why, while others go along careless and joyous, carried away at the will of their pleasure, their interest and their lusts, why hast Thou put before me this task which overwhelms me by its very greatness? Why hast Thou created in my conscience that thirst for holiness which troubles all my wicked joys? Why hast Thou placed in

my heart that love which poisons all my pleasures and makes me feel, even in their delights, their bitterness and the nothingness of their vanity?"

Thus do our foolish complainings ascend to God, and yet, what would we wish Him to do? That He demand less of us, that He propose to us less than holiness, less than love? But what a God would He be who would be satisfied in this way? Ah! you would not believe in Him for a single day. He would be inferior to you, and your conscience would exact that which He Himself no longer exacted. My brethren, we must choose, either to degrade the divine law to the level of our base nature, or to raise our nature to the level of the divine law.

Alas! You know what most men are doing; they are effacing, by continuous contact with the world, the image of God engraven on their hearts, deforming the soul in order to bend it to the accepted standard of morals, smothering the voice of their conscience and heart. But you cannot do this. If I should counsel you thus for a moment, if from this pulpit, in order to please your selfishness, I preached a degraded standard of morals, you might applaud me, but there would

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be something in you which would despise my preaching. No, you know too much to renounce the ideal to which God calls you. All the reasonings, all the sophisms of the world and of your own heart will try in vain to bring about the change. A voice, supreme, imperative, cries out to you, that it is to God your life must be brought back, to that God who owns you by right of creation, and by right of salvation. Instead of degrading the divine law to the level of your nature, the only solution to this terrible problem which is worthy of God and of yourselves is to elevate your nature to the level of the law of God; but is this solution possible? It is, for it ought to be; it is, because our conscience affirms it to us; it is, because God declares it to us; and He who knows of what we are made, He who knows our miseries, our corruption, and our incurable weakness, does not wish to present to us any other end than to be like Him. Dare to say He beguiles us, dare to say that He holds up before us an end impossible of attainment, that He trifles with us in creating in our souls a desire without object, a hunger without appease, a search without issue;—or, rather, believe in the God of the Gospel who places before us the ideal,

and incites us unceasingly to realize it; who calls us, converts us, regenerates us, and after having commenced the work of our salvation wishes to continue and complete it.

But here I hear your objection. You agree with me that the end which the Gospel proposes to us is alone worthy of God and of yourselves; but you oppose to me your experience, you show me your languishing faith, your stationary life, your fruitless efforts, and you are ready to repeat with the prophet, "As for me I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for naught, and in vain." The ill success of his labor is, as we have already said, the *second* cause of the Christian's discouragement.

Before replying to you, my brethren, let me recall to you a fact which you like myself may have observed. Do you know what Christians mourn the most deeply over the ill success of their efforts? They are almost always the most active and the most advanced Christians. Yes, listen to it, that man whose sanctified life is a model to you, who lives in the midst of the world as not of the world, who preaches by his works more than by his words, who, severe toward himself, lenient toward others, astonishes

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you by his vigilance, his self-denial, his charity. You will hear him mourn over his weaknesses, his lukewarmness, his little zeal: you will hear him speak with a sincere dismay of all the bounties God has bestowed on him for so many years, of the responsibility which weighs on his soul, of the time he has lost, of the opportunities he has missed; you will hear him apply to himself without affectation the most humiliating passages of Scripture, and ask God to pardon even his good works where his own eye recognizes the tares with the wheat, and the dirt mixed with the pure gold. Or yet again, draw near to those giants of the spiritual order, those workmen of God who in different ages have been called Elijah, St. Paul, Chrysostom, St. Bernard, Luther, or Whitfield, and who confound you by the immense work which they have accomplished:—you will hear them groan under the small results of their works. Elijah cries out to God: “Take away my life, I am not better than my fathers.” Isaiah pronounces the words of my text: “I have spent my strength for naught, and in vain.” St. Paul trembles in fear of having been a useless laborer; St. Bernard expresses in his last letters the painful feeling of having accomplished al-

most nothing. Calvin dying said to those who surrounded him: "All that I have done has been of no value. The wicked will gladly seize upon this word. But I repeat it, all that I have done has been of no value, and I am a miserable creature."<sup>1</sup>

What must we conclude? That these men did nothing? No, but, that in the presence of the ideal which God has put in their heart, their work appeared to them almost lost. It is in effect, my brethren, that it enters into God's plan to conceal from us almost always the results of what we do for Him. In other domains the success of truth appears often visible, illustrious. Here it seems as if the seed were lost, the bread swallowed up under the waters on which it was cast, and all work in the end remained fruitless.

Why does God will it? First of all, doubtless, that faith may be exercised. Picture, if but an instant, a Christian life, where each effort will bear its fruits, where response will follow prayer, harvest seed-time, and the joy of deliverance long and painful sacrifices. In such a case who would not be a Christian, who would not want

<sup>1</sup> *Les Lettres Françaises de Calvin*, II. p. 576.

to be one at this price? Self-interest would be the first motive with all, and the kingdom of God would be peopled with mercenaries. But where would be the sublime spectacle of the faith which hopes, which waits and acts without seeing, and how could God glorify Himself therein? But God does not wish to be served by mercenaries. He often hides from His children the fruit of their labors, to the end that they may work for Him and not for themselves; He hides it from them in order that they may find in Him their recompense, and not in the result of their work, nor in the outward success which would take the place of His approbation, nor even in the progress of a sanctified life, for perfection apart from Him might become an idol.

But it is not only to strengthen our faith that God treats us thus, it is also to humble us. Ah! my brethren, how seldom is it that man can bear success, and not bend under its weight! You have often in the world admired a great man from a distance; as long as you knew only his works, he seemed to you placed on a pedestal, a prestige surrounded him, everything about him seemed on the level of his genius, and you would have believed him elevated far above all our

littleness. So have you thought until you got a close view of him; then you were astonished to find in that soul of savant, artist, or writer, all the miseries that overexcited self-love and vanity can develop; you have seen him, a prey to sordid envies, depreciate his rivals, deny the genius of others, unite pedantry with ostentation; you have seen the finest talents associated with the smallest character, and you have grieved over humanity because of it. Do I draw here an imaginary picture, and is it not a fact a thousand times observed? There is in success an intoxication which few men can bear.

Picture to yourself, then, success in a divine work becoming thus a source of intoxication to him who obtains it, seducing his mind, swelling his heart and filling it with vanity the most unworthy, at the very moment when he is talking of what is grandest, most sacred in the world. Picture to yourself, oh the blasphemy of it, a St. Paul, full of himself, intoxicated with his own glory, seeking to make a name for himself, working but for his own interests. Now this is the scandal which God would spare His Church, and, while in all other domains the most ardent selfishness and the most glaring pride often attain



the grandest results, God has willed that, in His kingdom, the empire of souls shall belong only to those who renounce themselves. Thus, in order to save His servants from the intoxication of success, it pleases Him to hide from them the result of their work and to send them in the midst of their most fruitful activity the most bitter incitements to discouragement. Severe discipline of love, by which He recovers those whom He loves, and chastises those whom He makes His chosen instruments!

It is not only humility which He teaches them in this school, it is moreover gentleness and compassion. Success alone will never develop these. Success gives strength. Strength! Ah! that is a great deal, without doubt: but something besides strength is needed to do good here below. If there are times when a strong arm is necessary, there are other times when what is most necessary is a soft and delicate hand which does not break the bruised reed. When Jesus pronounced that sublime word, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest," He did not add, "Come unto Me, for I am strong," He said, "Come unto Me, for I am meek and lowly of

heart." Admirable expression which shows all the power of the lowly, hidden virtues of tenderness and of compassion. These virtues He possessed to the full, He whom the Bible calls by turns the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God. But He will produce them—Oh the marvel of it!—in a former Pharisee, in Saul of Tarsus. He will make of this hero of the faith, of this giant, this invincible wrestler, a man who can write to the Thessalonians, "I was gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children." He will produce in this rugged, haughty, proud nature the most delicate features of the most exquisite charity. How will He do it? By breaking His power, by leaving a thorn in the flesh, by exercising Him in the austere school of patience. Is it not this that can alone explain to you the gentleness of Paul, and that tender solicitude for the feeble which throbs all through his epistles.

Well, I appeal to yourselves, when you are suffering, when your soul wavers under doubt, do you need then one of those strong souls, whose serene and never troubled faith ignores your perplexities? No, you need a soul, which like your own, has mourned, which has suffered with your sufferings, known your doubts, fol-

lowed your obscure paths. O my brethren, all ye who have known, as we, the sorrows of discouragement, you who have prayed without a response, have labored without result, what was it that most consoled you in those bitter hours? Was it not such avowals as this of my text? When you have heard an Elijah groan because of having labored in vain, an Isaiah crying, "I have spent my strength for naught and in vain," have you not blessed those sister souls, in whom you may recognize your own struggles, your griefs, your pains, and have you not felt your heart become calm, your faith grow strong, in seeing that at so many centuries distance you are but enduring the trials from which these great believers came out victorious?

Here is the reason, my brethren, so far at least as we can understand it, why God conceals from us the fruit of our labors. Mark it well, however, that this fruit is only hidden; it will appear in due time. No, no one in serving the Lord has the right to say, "I have labored in vain." Let him say it who has succeeded in everything, and who has cared only for himself—him who has seen his coffers filled, his schemes realized and prosperity surpassing his

hopes. Let him say it even when all come to congratulate him on his immense labor, on his life so well filled up, on his enormous success; for, in working for himself alone, he has done but a work of naught. But the believer who has referred his life to God, though he has been able only to accomplish in secret the humblest of works, though he has been able only to mourn in forced inaction and in sickness, has never the right to say, "'Tis in vain I have labored." There is no work so small that God does not accept and reward it, if it has been prompted by love to Him. You never know all the good you do, when you do good. Those heroes of the Bible when, faithful to duty, they humbly died to accomplish it, did they know what a heritage of strength, courage, and edification they were leaving to all the centuries to come? When St. Stephen, the first of the martyrs, sinking under the blows of those who stoned him, lifted heavenward an angelic look and prayed for his executioners, did he know that that look and that prayer would make upon the conscience of one of the witnesses of that scene an indelible impression, and that, by a wonderful union the magnificent

apostolate of Paul would be connected with his death?

And you, when you utter an humble and firm word of testimony to the truth, do you know whither the wind will carry that precious seed and in what heart it will take root? Do you know what result will follow some day from that sacrifice which was unobserved, that devotion which is despised, that patient love which seems to remain without fruit?

And even when nothing of it shall remain upon the earth, and the indifference of the world shall seem to conceal forever your labors and your sacrifices, there will be left you the consolation of the prophet, "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." Yes, this it is which ever constitutes the strength of the Christian. Solitary, deserted, despised by men, he has for witness, for approver, for judge, the invisible Master, whom nothing escapes and by whom nothing is forgotten. God has seen him, that suffices him; he has not lost his reward.

Does this imply, my brethren, that I would appeal indirectly to interested motives, and exhort you to labor with the view of assured wages? We are often reproached with this; I hear to-

day a haughty philosophy tell us that after all we only know how to work for success; I hear our modern stoics thus assail, from the height of their serenity, our hope in the final recompense. They tell us, these pretended sages, that the approbation of conscience suffices, and that the honest man needs nothing more. What do they mean by this? That the good should be loved for itself, and not from a motive outside of the good, that God should be served not because He rewards, but because He is the truth itself? Is this their idea? But we have said this before them, and a thousand times have we in the name of the gospel combated that servile, interested spirit, which seeks its own while pretending to serve God. But while condemning the grosser motive, the inferior allurements of recompense, shall we go so far as to say that the approval of conscience suffices? No, my brethren, this were to ignore human nature, to crush its best instincts. We cannot be our own end, nor our own judge; we cannot be a reward unto ourselves. We must have a witness of our conduct, a look which encourages us, a heart which understands us. What demands it also is that imperative need of justice which wills that the

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good never come to naught, but that it find its sanction in the disposition, in the approbation of the universal Judge. If you only leave to man his conscience, you will have the grand but hopeless spectacle of the stoicism which commits suicide in order to escape from the triumph of evil. If on the contrary you show us a God who understands us, who encourages us, who counts our sighs, our tears, our sacrifices, you kindle in the heart of humanity a courage which nothing can extinguish, not even the bitterest ill-success. Count, if you can, all the souls which this feeling alone upholds against despair.

Often on Sunday morning when we unite in our songs and prayers, and feel our faith grow strong in fraternal communion, I think of those from whom these blessings are withheld; I think of that isolated pastor, pursuing laboriously his ministry in the midst of an indifferent or perhaps hostile people, praying without response, preaching without success, and forced to say in looking back—"I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for naught and in vain"; I think of that missionary stationed in a pagan land, gathering together a few proselytes who scarcely understand him, and feeling that all the aspirations

of his heart are withering under a freezing indifference, a stupid and gloomy opposition. For such, each of these Sundays, which are the church's festivals, is as it were a new trial of faith, when the bitter sense of the vanity of their efforts comes to haunt them unceasingly. Ah! my brethren, these are the heroes of the faith. One often looks at ministers who are encouraged by success and says of them, "What ardor! what zeal!" As for me, I would say to you, even as Jesus Christ, "Is it there you look?" Is it a great task and a very difficult mission to preach to sympathetic hearts and minds, to speak the truth where one is sure beforehand that it will be listened to and perhaps accepted? Ah! if God in His divine wisdom did not see fit to join to such a ministry secret crosses and hidden humiliations, how much reason would there be to fear that in pursuing it one is walking by sight rather than by faith, that the approbation of man takes the place of the approbation of God! No, the real combatants, the true heroes are those in unknown and inglorious posts, confronting alone an incredulous world, alone in believing, in hoping, in loving, called by a severe dispensation to sow without reaping, and scoffed at perhaps by an unbelief



which thrusts at them the word of the psalm, "What is thy God doing?"

Ah! I know that God who sees them and knows their anguish, reserves for them secret compensations; I know that in their isolation, they advance farther than we in the communion of Christ's sufferings, and that they feel more closely united to the crucified Witness of unheeded truth, who saw His own ministry despised, who reached out His arms to a rebellious people, who wept over Jerusalem, and whose dying eyes gazed upon a people who cursed Him. But what would they do, I ask you, if they had not this refuge? What would they do if they could not say with the prophet, "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God."

But why choose these extreme examples? After all, mark it well, this trial is the lot of all of us, if we are truly disciples of Jesus Christ. The best part of our life escapes the world, for the world sees but the exterior. There are virtues, sacrifices, which are recompensed here on earth by recognition and love. But this is the exception. Do you know what keeps the world alive, do you know what saves humanity? It is those thousands of obscure acts, of unknown de-

votions, of silent sacrifices of which God alone is witness, and which would not happen but for Him. Yes, if there are Christian nations who carry with them the future of the world—that is to say progress, liberty, faith and hope—if there is on earth an asylum for the suffering, if there is a church where the gospel can be preached, all this had not been possible, be sure of it, except by virtue of heroism in the past, of self-sacrifices buried in oblivion. Like those Roman walls, formed of small stones joined by an imperishable cement, which have braved the assaults of centuries, the foundations of the church are formed of small virtues which none can ever estimate.

We are the inheritors of eighteen centuries of sacrifices, and of these the world sees but the least part. No ear hath heard, no voice will rehearse all of the anguish, nor of the firmness, the sublime courage which is hidden in those cells, in those dungeons where the martyrs of the faith have yielded up their lives by thousands; nor can any one tell all of the forgivings, the generous forgettings, the sacrifices, the victories over the flesh and over pride, which the Christian faith accomplishes every day in our

own midst. But how would these dearly bought triumphs, which often cost so many tears, be possible if the Christian were not able to say, "My judgment is with the Lord and my work with my God?"

To work then, discouraged souls! Shake off that gloomy torpor which paralyzes you, that unhealthy sadness in which you delight. To work! And do not add to the many days lost in the past, as many new days given up to a fruitless regret. Oh, that you may bring to the service of the adorable Master all that worldlings know how to give of their time, heart and life, to that vanity which destroys them! Is it not in the service of the world that it may be said, "I have labored in vain! I have spent my strength for naught and in vain?" And if one does not say it to-day while dazzled by its fleeting lustre, will he not be compelled to say it at that dreadful moment when illusion will be impossible, when Death will speak, when the world can no longer offer consolation or hope, and when account must be rendered to God of the talents He has confided to us. O despair! O misery! To have lived only for self; to have played perhaps a great *rôle*, attained a high

position, gained fortune and fame, and after all that, to discover that one's life has been wasted and that the all-essential has been forgotten! To learn all this, but too late, to see the night of one's agony illuminated by the light of the Gospel as by the lightning's flash, to understand how one ought to live at the moment when one must die!

Well, these dreadful surprises you, my brethren, do not fear. You know whither your life leads, for it reaches to eternity, and whatever may be your trials, you have the unspeakable joy of serving the living and faithful God. And you who know all the grandeur, all the beauty of a Christian life, who believe that not one of your efforts is lost, who bring each his stone to the great edifice which God is raising through the centuries,—do you groan, do you bow your heads and drop your arms from weariness, do your hearts fail you? You believe in the victory of redeeming love, and do you show to the world a languishing and joyless piety, a discolored religion, an extinguished hope? And what success, what triumph do you expect to obtain, what proselyting would you accomplish? No, no, it is not in looking at yourself or your barren

work, it is in looking to the Captain and the Finisher of the faith, that you will feel strengthened. Security, strength, salvation, victory, are found in beholding the Sun of righteousness, who carries healing in His beams.

Lift your eyes on high, then, disciples of Jesus Christ! Against all the evils of nature, all the sadness of the soul, all the delusions of earth, hold up the unspeakable beauty of the everlasting good. Above this world, which despises you and scoffs at you, see your God who is looking at you, listen to the saints who applaud you. Rejoice even in those who mock your efforts, for they will obtain inheritance from your sacrifice; and if anything can save them, it is your indomitable fidelity, your untiring love. Courage! and after every ill-success and every defeat, repeat these steadfast words, "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God!" Amen.











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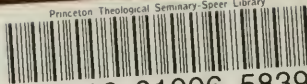
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